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ABSTRACT

Based on interviews with students and staff and several months of observing life and work in the school, this report examines Colorado's Mountain Open High School, where the program is based on the notion that secondary education should be the rite of passage from adolescence to mature adulthood. Chapter One introduces the people and facilities of Mountain Open High School, and the methods used to obtain information about them. Chapter Two outlines the program and resources, including personnel, facilities, and activities. Chapter Three portrays the critical routines of the school. Chapter Four gives student views of the challenges and demands of independence and responsibility. Chapter Five is devoted to student and staff accounts of interpersonal relationships and the troubles that occur in an experiential program. Chapter Six describes the essential elements of Walkabout, a trip, and two passages. The final chapters put Mountain Open High School into a broader educational framework and extract lessons the school has for experiential education in general. A glossary of terms concludes the account. (JHZ)

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# EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION in HIGH SCHOOL

## Life in the Walkabout Program

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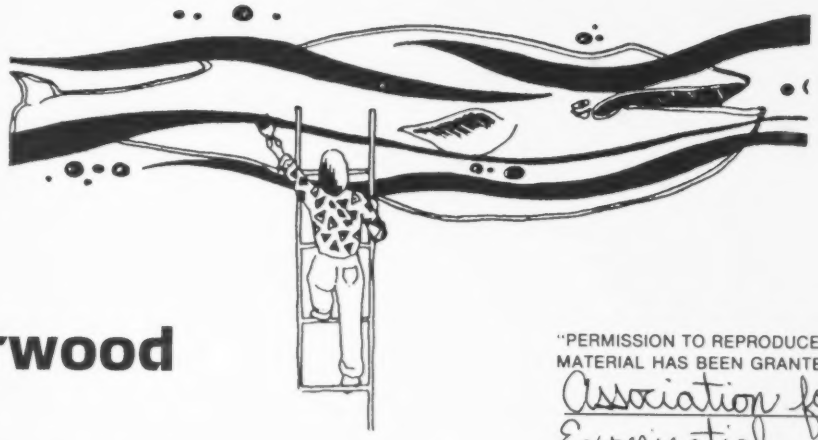

by **Bert Horwood**

with foreword

by **Maurice Gibbons**

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# EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION IN HIGH SCHOOL:

## Life in the Walkabout Program.

Bert Horwood

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## Dedication

To the students and Staff
of
Mountain Open High School,
past, present and future.

My car broke down, I missed the bus.
Car broke down. I missed the bus.
My car broke down, I missed the bus.
I won't be at school to-day.

My dog ate it; I left it on the couch.
My dog ate it; I couldn't find a pen.
My dog ate it; I spaced out, man.
And my Gran'ma threw it away.
My car broke down, I missed the bus.
Bus broke down, it squashed m' car.
My girl broke up, she broke my leg.
And I won't be at school to-day.

I need some lunch money, can you lend me
twenty bucks?
Can you lend me twenty bucks?
Can you lend me twenty bucks?
I'll pay you back right away?

My car broke down, I missed the bus.
Car broke down, the bus didn't wait.
My car broke down, I missed the bus.
And I won't be at school...
I know it ain't cool.
I'm nobody's fool,
But I won't be at school to-day.

Dan Mc Crimmon
for students and staff of
Jefferson County Open High School

## Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Dr. Richard Kraft, School of Education, University of Colorado, Boulder, for introducing me to Mountain Open High School. Thanks are also due to the students and staff of the school for their positive response to my presence. Several colleagues across continental North America as well as editorial staff of Phi Delta Kappa Books encouraged me to set my notes and transcripts into publishable form and I am grateful for their good opinions of this work.

Closer to home, there is a special debt of gratitude owing to my friend and colleague James Raffan, whose unerring editorial eye and incisive blue pencil contributed much to the clarity and attractiveness of the piece. The awkward sentences remaining are entirely due to my own intransigence. The sensitive sketches are the work of Libbi Stewart, artist and teacher. Queen's University at Kingston provided sabbatical leave and also the computer facilities for editing and producing the manuscript.

To all of these people and institutions, I give my thanks.

## Foreword

If there is a greater pleasure for an educational developer than seeing his ideas successfully translated into practice, it is seeing the success recorded in detail for others to understand and, perhaps, emulate. Bert Horwood's book *Experiential Education In High School: Life in the Walkabout Program* is an excellent record of the outstanding program developed at Colorado's Mountain Open High School under the leadership of Arnold Langberg. As the author of the Walkabout concept of education, I am proud to be associated with the book, the school and their creators.

Walkabout is adapted from a traditional practice of aboriginal Australian tribes in which adolescents are sent alone into the desert-like outback for several months to prove their readiness for adulthood. This practice intrigued me because it embodied many features I felt were lacking in the rearing and education of the young in our more sophisticated, technological society. Walkabout, like the educational practices of most primal peoples, is intensely experiential and challenging; it is holistic, drawing on the personal and spiritual resources of the individual as well as his knowledge and skill. It is a task that both teaches and tests the individual in a way that is entirely appropriate for life in that culture. And the Walkabout is both solitary and public, beginning as it does with years of preparation by family and elders, and culminating in a celebratory tribal ritual of transition from adolescence to adulthood. The question I asked was, What would a Walkabout challenge adapted for youth in our society be like?

Since I began working with young people as an elementary and secondary school teacher, and later as a professor and program developer, my main concern has been, how can we empower students? How can we help

them learn, relate, act, and live effectively now so that they will also be equipped to deal with an uncertain personal and societal future? As I experienced it, schooling was inordinately absorbed with information; information which was often dated, usually irrelevant to students, and unavoidably ephemeral. This information was almost exclusively presented in lecture form, studied in texts, practised in written excercises, and tested verbally. It all seemed so profligately wasteful. No matter what we did, within the traditional framework, so many bright students got bored and languished; so many slower students struggled and gave up. When I worked with high school seniors through their final year, I was stunned by how shocked they were to find school was over, how unprepared they seemed to accomplish the transition from youth to adulthood.

I began to search for alternatives. As an English teacher, I launched a school drama club, and soon noticed the difference in students from all levels of ability when confronted with public performance. It gave purpose and appropriate pressure to prepare. So many said during rehearsals, "So this is what Shakespeare (or Becket, or Synge) is all about" that I began to dramatize every form of fiction in the classroom. Drama, the drama of drama, was one key ingredient in the alternative I was seeking. Another was participation. With the help of administration and faculty, I began a three-day retreat for creative students, for the curious, precocious, provocative and skilled from all fields. An elected team of students planned the program with me. It combined work and play; presentations, small group discussions, and creative activities. These sessions became watersheds for us all. They chose to address vocations, politics, sex, personal values and philosophies, mature literature, the future and how to prepare for life after school. Fifteen years after they began, these retreats were still going strong. Teachers and students both asked why regular schooling could not be as intense and compelling, but we were never able to answer that question.

After becoming a professor, I became involved with the Outward Bound Mountain School and discovered the power of challenge and metaphorical experience that led participants to ask, "If I can climb a cliff that seemed impossible, what else might I be able to accomplish in my life?" A group of colleagues and I introduced such challenge metaphors into teacher education. Then, to explore the power of experience and affiliation in learning, we set up *Stop the World, I Want To Get On* involving 350 adolescents from 18 high schools brought together for a week in a double gym of a college closed for spring break. Students met in families of 25, designed and built their environments, used the city for learning, pursued personal growth and planning activities, designed and executed projects in working teams, entertained themselves and experienced a range of participatory art and science activities. What began as a 9:00 am to 3:00 pm program was 8:00 am to 11:00 pm by the third day. The conclusion was a celebratory feast and declaration for the future that no one who attended will ever forget.

All of these emerging features we introduced into an experimental teacher education program that combined drama, challenge, participation, affiliation, field experiences, solitude, personal planning, declaration and celebration. Somewhere in these explorations, we realized that we were working with necessary processes rather than assigned content, and that we could greatly enhance the performance of students and the quality of their experience by teaching the skills and processes needed to make the most of the activities they were pursuing. These processes included such things as goal-setting and planning, designing one's own learning projects, communicating, problem-solving, leading and participating in groups, reflecting in solitude, securing and organizing resources, and evaluating one's progress. All of these we included in field-based as well

as classroom course work. Processes, we soon realized, could be used for a lifetime; responsibility, challenge and real world projects not only led to desired learning in compelling ways, but also led to personal growth and development of character.

But with the radical nature of this teacher education program, my colleagues and I finally stretched the tolerance of our faculty and university too far. As a group, we became exclusive and isolated. We failed to bring others on campus along with us; we became careless about explaining our projects and including others in the decisions and activities involved. During the period of severe backlash that followed, I turned to writing and translated many of our developing concepts into a program I called Walkabout.

The publication and success of "Walkabout: Searching for the Right Passage from Childhood and School" in the May, 1974, issue of *The Phi Delta Kappan* began an international network of school programs based on the proposals it contained. In essence, the article calls for a form of high school education which prepares young people for the transition from dependent adolescence to an independent, productive adulthood, and celebrates that transition. The core recommendation is to challenge students to challenge themselves to the best performance they can design in several areas: adventure, creative expression, logical inquiry, practical application and service. Students write contracts for what they will learn and accomplish, and then negotiate their plans with teachers and possibly parents and other adults. Upon completion of their contracts, students publicly demonstrate their accomplishments. This is followed by a school-community celebration, a celebration of their adult performance.

The large and favourable response to the publication of the article led *The Kappan* to establish a newsletter which built a network among emerging Walkabout programs. It ran for three years, and was followed by a taskforce on the transition of youth, including such well known educators as B. Frank Brown, James B. Coleman and Stan Elam, editor of *The*

*Kappan*. I was invited to write the taskforce report, *The New Secondary Education*, which was published in 1976 and became a precursor for a multitude of reports calling for reform of secondary education during the decade that followed. In the meantime, the article won an award for excellence from the American Educational Press Association and was reproduced in at least ten edited books. Early in the 1980s, it became the most requested reprint in the history of *The Kappan*. Then I was invited to write a follow-up article, "Walkabout Ten Years Later," for the May, 1984, issue. It was accompanied by reports from six schools with active Walkabout programs.

During the same time, at Simon Fraser University, we continued to develop concepts and practices designed to empower students to learn and act. Gary Phillips, after developing an outstanding Walkabout program at Learning Unlimited in Indianapolis, joined me for two years. During this time we refined the principles of Challenge Education and, with the assistance of Peter Norman, produced *The Self Directed Professional* for adults. Later, Barb Keating and I developed the *How To Become An Expert* program for students in middle grades. Last year I joined with school principal, Andy Neuman, to create World Citizens for a Universal Curriculum and produced *Toward A Universal Curriculum For A Global Generation* and, with Maureen Neuman, *Show Me How*. In these and other works which followed, we applied the principles of challenge and empowerment through the mastery of processes to five universal themes: global citizenship, membership in the family of mankind, stewardship of earth, peaceful resolution of conflict and management of the future. Under Andy Neuman's direction, several schools have already begun implementing these themes and practices. Many of the practices developed in these projects are now established elements in the teacher education program at Simon Fraser University. And the work continues.

Walkabout changed my life. It came at a critical time in the development of my ideas about the empowerment of youth to learn and act. I am very much aware how dependent these projects have been upon the patience, cooperation and contributions of many other people: colleagues at home and around the world, school administrators who have taken the risk to support experimental practices, editors and publishers (especially Stan Elam and Bob Cole of *The Kappan*), and the many parents and students who have participated in this work and supported it. Without such encouragement and assistance, little would have been accomplished.

And now this fine book by Bert Horwood celebrates the real achievement, the creation by Arnold Langberg and his colleagues, of an excellent school that makes a difference in the lives of its students, and gives them the skill and confidence to make a difference in the world.

Maurice Gibbons
Bowen Island, B.C. 1987

# Table of Contents

**INTRODUCTION** ..... 1

**CHAPTER ONE** ..... 5
SOURCES OF INFORMATION ..... 5

**CHAPTER TWO** ..... 13
RESOURCES OF THE SCHOOL ..... 13
THE PROGRAM ..... 13
PERSONNEL ..... 19
FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES ..... 21

**CHAPTER THREE** ..... 27
SOME SCHOOL ROUTINES ..... 27
STAFF MEETING ..... 27
STAFF LUNCH ..... 31
GOVERNANCE ..... 32
ADVISING ..... 33
EVALUATION AND GRADUATION ..... 36

**CHAPTER FOUR** ..... 39
CHALLENGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES ..... 39
CHALLENGE ..... 39
INDEPENDENCE AND RESPONSIBILITY ..... 47

**CHAPTER FIVE** ..... 51
GETTING ALONG IN AN EXPERIENTIAL PROGRAM ..... 51
PERSONAL RELATIONS ..... 51
AN EXPERIENTIAL PROGRAM ..... 59
TROUBLES IN THE SCHOOL ..... 61
CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS ..... 65

**CHAPTER SIX** ..... **67**
WALKABOUT IN ACTION ..... 67
PASSAGES ..... 67
TRIPS ..... 69

**CHAPTER SEVEN** ..... **77**
WALKABOUT IN PERSPECTIVE ..... 77

**CHAPTER EIGHT** ..... **87**
LESSONS FOR EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATORS ..... 87
THE OUTWARD BOUND CONNECTION ..... 87
OTHER FORMS OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION ..... 89
STAFF MORALE ..... 92
CONCLUSION ..... 93

**GLOSSARY OF TERMS** ..... **97**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** ..... **103**

# List of Illustrations

Figure 1. Walkabout in the Comics. . . . . 3
Figure 2. Schematic Diagram of the Program. . . . . 14
Figure 3. Floor Plan Sketch, Mountain Open High School. . . . . 22
Figure 4. Working on a Creativity Passage. . . . . 28
Figure 5. International Dance Class. . . . . 44
Figure 6. The Whale Mural Is Repaired. . . . . 56
Figure 7. It was cold and dark when the van was loaded. . . . . 71
Figure 8. Illustrations of Models I and II. . . . . 83

# INTRODUCTION

This is a portrait of an unusual school, unusual because its program is based on the notion that secondary education should be the rite of passage from adolescence to mature adulthood. High school students, it is supposed, should demonstrate the qualities to be expected of independent adults in a free society before graduation.

The idea of high school as a rite of passage was first clearly expressed by Maurice Gibbons (1974) who was impressed by the relevance of an Australian film called "Walkabout." Gibbons later (1976) developed the idea more fully in a book, *The New Secondary Education.* He called attention to the failure of high schools to graduate students with adult competencies, in contrast to the effectiveness of "primitive" rites of passage as exemplified by the Australian aboriginal walkabout. Then he wrote an idealized account of a program which he thought could work in a modern context.

But is such a thing possible? And if so, how is it be done? These were the questions in my mind when I first visited Mountain Open High School and asked permission from the principal to conduct an inquiry into the school by observing classes and interviewing students and staff.

The request was courteously received and skillfully deflected. Decisions of that kind were not made by the principal, I was told, but by the entire community. It would be necessary to get on the agenda of the school's weekly Governance meeting and make my request there. In due course I was a guest at Governance. The meeting was chaired by a student, and within a couple of hours I had presented my case and secured the cooperation of the entire school.

I found this intruiging because of its relationship to the ideas about professional and institutional behaviour developed by Chris Argyris and Donald Schön. Their idea is that professional practice is based on two

kinds of theories of action, the espoused theories (the ones contained in public statements about the school) and the theories that actually govern action. The espoused theories of a school are the claims made in its literature and official statements. The theories in use are those inferred from events and behaviour of staff and students. Institutions and professions tend to be marked by discrepancies between the two kinds of theories and it was an exciting possibility to have found a school that broke the norm.

The school had adopted and adapted Gibbons's ideas about high school educating students for responsible adulthood. It also gave the appearance of operating in a way in which the espoused theories were perfectly consistent with the theories in use. Having been given permission from the school community to observe life and work in the school for several months, what follows is a picture of what I found as I sought to test the conversion of dreams to realities.

Chapter One introduces the people and the facilities of Mountain Open High School, and the methods used to come to know them. Chapter Two outlines the program and resources. Chapter Three portrays the critical routines of the school. Chapter Four gives student views of the challenges and demands of independence and responsibility. Chapter Five is devoted to students and staff accounts of interpersonal relationships and the troubles that occur in an experiential program. Chapter Six describes the essential elements of Walkabout, a trip and two passages. The final chapters put Mountain Open High School into a broader educational framework and extract lessons the school has for experiential education in general. A glossary of terms concludes the account.

TALL ENOUGH-- WEIGHS ENOUGH-- REACHES THINGS WITH-OUT A STOOL-- LIFTS HEAVY THINGS...
DO YOU EAT ALL YOUR VEGETABLES?
STAY UP LATE WITHOUT FALLING ASLEEP?
CAN YOU TELL TIME?
CALL PEOPLE BY THEIR FIRST NAMES?
YES.
YES.
YES.
YES.
YES.
DRESS YOURSELF?
...VOICE IS DEEP-- WALKS FAST...
CONGRATULATIONS! YOU ARE NOW A GROWNUP!
I MADE IT, MOM! CAN YOU COME AND PICK ME UP NOW?
WHEN DO WE GET TO BE GROWNUPS, DOLLY?
IT'S A SPECIAL DAY. THEY CHECK YOU OUT, AND IF YOU PASS-- YOU'RE IN!

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**Figure 1. Walkabout in the Comics.**

CHAPTER ONE

# SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the students and staff of Mountain Open High School. Their words and actions provided the main sources of information that constitute this school portrait. The methods of getting the information and of arranging it into a comprehensive picture of experience-based education are also outlined.

It is a problem to know how much anonymity to grant the people who give information. In this case, the school is well-known and there is no attempt to hide its identity. In fact, it is desirable that readers should be able to contact the school and satisfy themselves about the nature of its work. It follows then, that the publically appointed officers of the school can scarcely be hidden by pseudonyms. Their identities are a matter of public record and no attempt will be made to conceal them. On the other hand, students are more vulnerable and because they spoke freely (as did everyone) they deserve to have confidentiality. Student informants have been given pseudonyms and these are used when identifying the source of any statement. Some staff members who contributed ideas and information but who did not give formal interviews are identified by the office they held.

The Principal at the time was Mr. Arnie Langberg. Ms. Ruth Steele, the present Principal, and Ms. Martie De Cou were teachers who granted interviews and who shared moments of their work. All three were major informants. Other teachers were also helpful in casual conversations and in making it possible for me to sit in on classes. Some were blatantly opportunistic in putting me to work while I was in their rooms, thus enabling me to interact and observe students in yet another way. These persons are not identified by name.

In a similar way, the other members of the school staff contributed information. The cafeteria manager helped me understand how Munchie worked to serve nutritional, social and educational needs in the school. The school secretary always seemed to know where people could be found and helped me not only use my time effectively, but also gave valuable information about the day-to-day running of the school.

All of the students provided information. Their presence and actions at Governance, Munchie, classes and in the gymnasium, corridors and lounge contributed both general impressions and specific observations. A casual conversation in the lunch line was as much grist for the mill as was a recorded interview. And a student reporting on a project or attempting to revise the program during a Governance meeting contributed useful information without the formality of an interview. Such students have not been identified by name or by pseudonym.

However, ten students were especially helpful in granting me detailed interviews, usually of at least an hour's duration. In several cases, there were follow-up interviews to clarify a point or to keep informed of current events. These interviews were sometimes recorded, but more often they were brief casual conversations subsequently recorded in field notes. These students are identified by a pseudonym and all quotations from any given student are always attributed to the same pseudonym. Notable comments from other students are not attributed to any particular person.

**Lucille** was sixteen and in her second year of the program. Her insights were especially significant because she had made a decision to transfer from Mountain Open to a regular high school and was in the process of preparing for that change.

**Debra** came to Mountain Open from Tanglewood, an alternative Junior High School whose program has similarities to that of Mountain Open. She was in her second year of the program and had just started her first walkabout passage.

**Pat** was in his final year and looking forward to completing the program and planning next steps. Whether or not to register for the military draft was a current problem for him, as was deciding on specific plans for his life after graduation. He was definitely interested in college but felt that a year of travel or work should come first.

**Marie** was a person whose parents did not want her to register in Mountain Open. She contributed a vivid picture of how the school attracts students from regular Junior High Schools and how parents may be involved in participating in difficult decisions. Marie was in the midst of the pre-walkabout phase, hoping to complete the objectives in time to begin some walkabout passages in the next semester.

**Mark** was seventeen and in his final year of the program. Like Debra he had come from Tanglewood and had an accurate picture of what the Walkabout program would demand. As a senior student he was able to give detailed information about many aspects of life and work in the school.

**Bob and Bill** were first-year students who came from very different backgrounds but had formed a close friendship. After I had seen them involved in a remarkable incident in a folk-dance class they offered jointly to give an interview. Bob and Bill shed light on the values in use within the school and on the social structures that enabled them to form a valued but improbable friendship.

**Andy** was a mature and confident senior student. He provided information in interview and in numerous conversations during my visits. Andy was strongly interested in my work and sometimes it was difficult to tell who was interviewing whom when we sat down to talk.

**Tina** had just started the program after moving to the region from a distant State. She was a little disoriented both from her relocation and with respect the suitability of the choice of Mountain Open for her schooling needs. Her information gave an image of how the school looked to a new-comer who was uncertain about her future directions and commitments.

**Juanita** was eighteen, a senior student who had previously attended another alternative school in a different State. She also had an artistic flare for which schooling was not particularly helpful. Juanita's broad experience and special interest enabled her to have a unique view of Mountain Open High School which added greatly to the overall picture.

The data were collected during the fall and winter of 1982-83. In total, there were eight full-day visits and four half-day visits. During a typical visit I would stop at the office to say hello and catch up on news. There were no special protocols to follow, so I would go to the class I hoped to visit, or drop in for a coffee at Munchie pretty much as I pleased. Usually, there was specific business, like an interview to be held, or a class meeting to be observed or perhaps another important event to be attended such as a staff meeting or a Governance session. I was graciously included in two social events which enabled me to meet people from the community whom I had missed in the school. These occasions allowed a most productive mixture of business and pleasure.

All formal interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed. These constitute the bulk of the data for the portrait of the school. Other significant observations, made during informal conversations in corridors, classes and at lunch, also come into play in this account. After each visit

field notes were used to record observations and conversations. Note making also gave a good occasion to record uncertainties and ambiguities to be checked on subsequent visits. The repeated visits also permitted me to get more than one person's ideas about a given event or situation. Technically, this is known as triangulation, and provides a degree of reliability in constructing a picture from the accounts of informants. Triangulation is especially valuable in revealing differences in the perspectives of different persons and in helping to identify the theories in use in the school. The methods of investigation essentially follow those described by Spradley (1979, 1980).

I became concerned that my own favourable disposition based on pleasant and happy encounters in the school might be casting an unrealistically rosy hue over the information. To check that there was in fact a strong predominantly positive tone in the interviews, a word count was done. The words used as adjectives in all the students' recorded interviews were listed and tallied for frequency of occurrence. Most of the words could be quite easily classified and Table 1 gives a summary of the categories and frequency with which they were used.

Table 1. Table of descriptive words used by Mountain Open High School students in interviews, showing the frequencies of various descriptive categories.

| Category of words (with examples) | Number of different words | Occurrences No. (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Negative (bad, scary, miserable) | 19 | 24 (6.4) |
| Positive (good, great, fun) | 65 | 232 (61.4) |
| Positive slang (crazy, weird, odd) | 4 | 8 (2.1) |
| Magnitude (little, small) | 2 | 8 (2.1) |
| Magnitude (big, intensive, heavy, deep) | 9 | 16 (4.2) |
| Difficulty (easy, basic) | 2 | 7 (1.8) |
| Difficulty (challenging, demanding, hard) | 5 | 54 (14.3) |
| Other (different, variety, complex) | 15 | 30 (7.9) |

The count confirmed the positive impression. The statements of Mountain Open High School students were clearly positive in tone. In addition to clearly positive words, there were words whose usage expressed admiration like the slang term, **weird**, or like the words of positive magnitude, **big, intense**. All told these come to about seventy percent of the words. It is also noteworthy that the second largest category (about fourteen percent) were words associated with difficulty in the work, like **challenging, demanding** and **hard**. The numbers of different words used and frequencies are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Table of frequency
of descriptive words used by
Mountain Open High School students in interviews.

| Number of times each different word was used | Number of different words at each occurrence rate, with examples |
|---|---|
| 1 | 59 (aggressive, grotty, vast) |
| 2 | 10 (clear, excellent, rugged) |
| 3 | 20 (big, exciting, open) |
| 4 | 7 (basic, demanding, nice) |
| 5 | 5 (caring, weird, relevant) |
| 6 | 2 (little, free) |
| 7 | 2 (more, new) |
| 8 | 1 (bad) |
| 9 | 1 (responsible) |
| 10 | 1 (fun) |
| 13 | 1 (different) |
| 15 | 2 (interesting, difficult) |
| 17 | 1 (great) |
| 28 | 1 (hard) |
| 43 | 1 (good) |

Totals: 378 words counted and 119 different words used.

There were three other sources of information and verification. A comprehensive report of the investigation was given to the principal and several teachers at Mountain Open High School for comments and corrections. The dissertation of Mary Sweeney (1983) provided early background about the organization of the school as well as confirmatory interview data. The school provided specimens of students journals, evaluations, staff comments and other documents to support the description of the trip in Chapter Six. The account of Gregory and Smith (1986) drew heavily on Sweeney's work and on my own notes but also contained original observations which provided a valuable check on accuracy.

CHAPTER TWO

# RESOURCES OF THE SCHOOL

This chapter describes the program, the personnel resources and the facilities available at Mountain Open High School. The description is essentially what was found at the time of the study. The situation is fundamentally the same at the time of writing although details may be changed. See Gregory and Smith (1986) for a more recent version.

## *THE PROGRAM*

The purpose of this section is to introduce the language of the program and to provide a framework for describing the operation of the school in more detail.

Mountain Open High School provides an experience-based program for students in the time interval equivalent to grades ten through twelve. The school does not have grades or credits in the usual sense but does provides the equivalent of high school graduation as defined by the County School system. The actual time taken by a student to graduate varies about the three year norm, some taking two years, some four.

The curriculum is largely based on the Walkabout ideal of Maurice Gibbons. In general, the operative value is that secondary education ought to enable adolescents to become fully functional, responsible adults in contemporary society. Many aspects of the program are analogous to aspects of a rite of passage from childhood to maturity, as outlined by Gibbons.

The program, sometimes globally identified as "Walkabout", consists of three parts. (Figure 2.) *Beginnings* and *Learning to Learn* form the first part and initiate new students into the school and its ways. *Pre-Walkabout* is the second part. Students take courses and other forms of instructional activities with a view to meeting the pre-requisite objectives for entry into the third part, *Walkabout Challenges* or *Passages*. On completion of the *Passages*, the student is elegible for graduation.

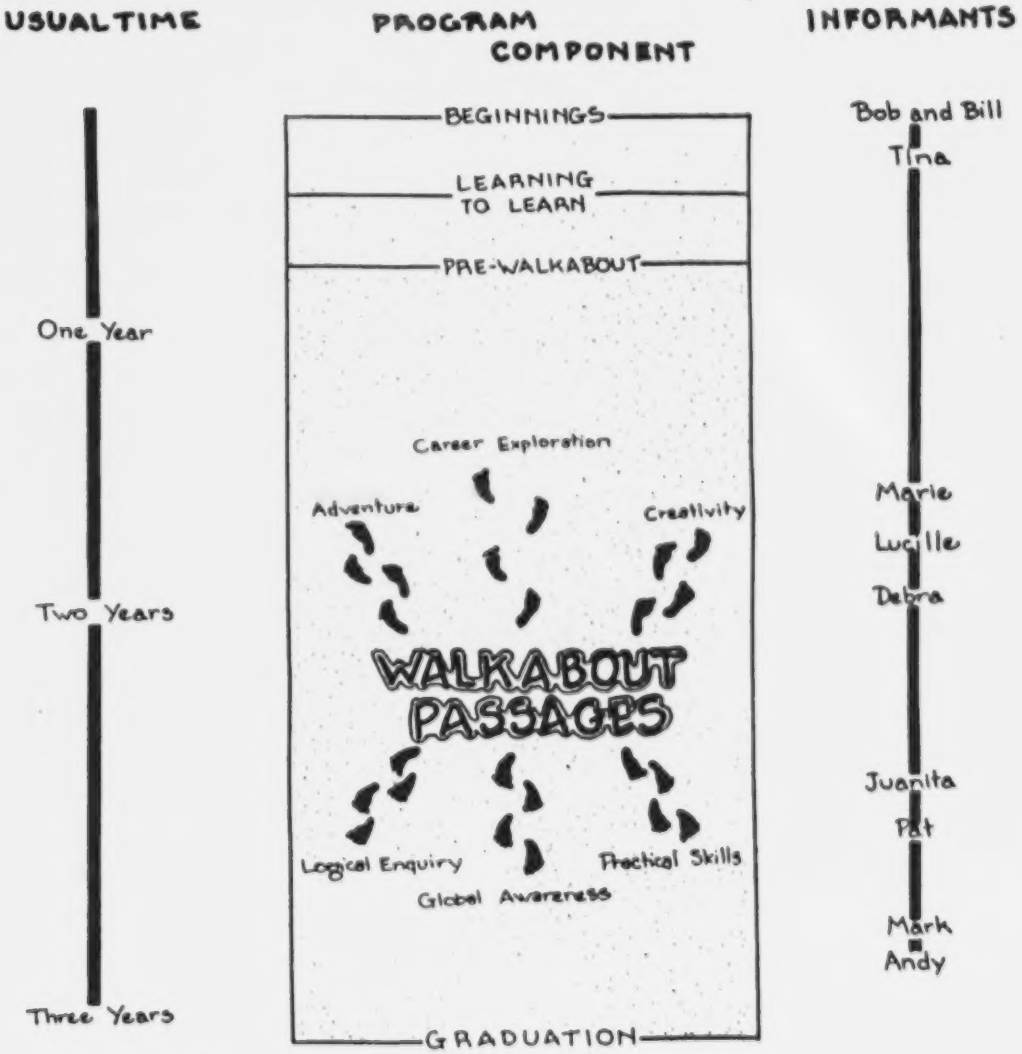


**Figure 2. Schematic Diagram of the Program.**

When new students arrive they are initiated into the program through a three-week introduction called *Beginnings*. The new students not only learn what are the expectations of the school community in *Beginnings*, they also shed erroneous preconceptions about the school and its inhabitants. Two main trips in this introduction, one to a wilderness area and the other to a large city, acquaint the students with program goals and initiate a sense of group identity. The students share responsibility for planning the trips, including their sleeping and eating arrangements and the schedule of activities.

*Beginnings* is followed by a period of school-based instruction called *Learning to Learn*. This phase is important in initiating newcomers into crucial intricacies of the Walkabout program, such as maintaining a journal and knowing how to use available resources. A critical event at the stage of *Learning to Learn* is matching each student with an advisor. The advisor-advisee relationship is central to the program, and the interactions between students and teachers during *Beginnings* and *Learning to Learn* provide the basis for matching each student to an advisor.

After nine weeks, there is an interesting divergence between means and ends, as the second, or *Pre-Walkabout* phase of the program begins. The students are recognized as full-fledged members of the community and are no longer referred to as "new" students. They now have the responsibility for acquiring the skills that are demanded before entering the walkabout passages. The pre-walkabout skills are divided into a core group, which are prerequisite for all passages, and a group which are prerequisite for particular passages. Gaining skills, broadly interpreted, is the intention of this part of the program. The means consist of a wide variety of courses and activities which provide the students with experience, practice and knowledge leading to proof of competence in the skills. The burden of responsibility for gaining skills and establishing competence lies with the student. Most students are competent in at least the core skills sometime in their second year at the school.

The complete skills listing is given below. The core skills which are prerequisite for any walkabout passage are preceded by C.

**Personal Skills.** Be able to:

C1. administer first aid at the level necessary for a Red Cross Multimedia card or equivalent;
C2. strengthen and maintain physical and mental health;
C3. strengthen self-understanding and self-confidence;
C4. clarify values and develop principles for making moral decisions;
C5. develop a meaningful relationship with another person;
C6. relate effectively to two or more different groups;
C7. understand how to relate positively to the environment;
C8. understand the need for and the problems of transportation.

**Lifelong Learning Skills.** Be able to:

C9. read;
C10. write;
C11. compute;
C12. memorize;
C13. analyze;
C14. apply acquired knowledge and understanding to a new situation.

**Investigative Skills.** Be able to:

C15. design and execute an investigation, using scientific method, which results in a demonstrable conclusion;
16. understand the social, historical, and moral implications of science;
17. to use the library and resource materials.

**Consumer Skills.** Be able to:

C18. evaluate quantity in comparison to quality of goods for the dollar;
19. understand the methods of making consumer decisions, including the use of consumer assistance agencies;
20. understand the idea of taxation as well as specific tax details;
21. understand the idea of insurance as well as specific details of standard insurance policies;
22. understand the idea of interest as well as specific interest details;

23. understand basic legal documents, for example, contracts, warranties, bills of sale, etc.;
24. identify types of credit;
25. evaluate choices when seeking housing;
26. identify the medical and nutritional options in relation to mental and physical health.

**Citizenship Skills.** Be able to:
C27. demonstrate community responsibility through a community learning project or equivalent;
C28. locate community resources;
C29. cope with a bureaucracy;
30. understand the legal system;
31. identify community, state and national issues;
32. understand the how and why of governmental operations;
33. understand and recognize the basic causes and effects of stereotyping;
34. identify the basic principles of economic systems.

**Career Skills.** Be able to:

35. analyze employment trends;
36. prepare job application forms;
37. develop effective techniques for interviewing;
38. understand wages and the main aspects of payroll deductions.

**Aesthetic and Recreational Skills.** Be able to:

C39. create something;
40. develop recreational skills;
41. develop geographical, cultural, and political perspectives for travel;
42. enhance aesthetic appreciation.

**Family Skills.** Be able to:

43. understand alternative family structures;
44. understand responsibilities of parenting;
45. plan for long-range economic security;
46. deal with family crises;
47. develop family activities;
48. understand individuality within relationships;
49. understand family planning.

Walkabout proper consists of six major activities or projects called *Passages*. Each passage requires the student to plan in detail and perform a challenging, valuable learning project. At least one passage must be planned and performed in cooperation with another student. At least one passage must be done by the student alone. The execution of a passage requires clearing the plans with a passage committee, working independently, usually away from the school, and finally, preparing a terminal product which is made public as part of the evaluation process. Completion of the six passages constitutes the entire program and the student, having prepared a transcript (a resume-like summary of his education), is entitled to graduation. (A description of preliminary oral passage reports is given in Chapter Six.)

The six passages are: Logical Enquiry, Adventure, Global Awareness/Community Service, Practical Skills, Creativity and Career Exploration. The Logical Enquiry passage requires students to conduct a disciplined investigation, usually scientific in nature, although other kinds of research are not excluded. The Global Awareness or Community Service passage demands that students participate in a project which expands their knowledge of affairs beyond the immediate social circle in which they are at home. Service in a novel environment or activity in a political or economic sphere are ways of completing this passage. Students on Practical Skills passages undertake projects which develop wide ranges of skills such as house renovation, automobile repair or altering clothing. Sometimes, Creativity passages relate closely to Practical Skills ones. Here, students are required to be originally creative and produce something as a result. Products range from recorded songs to fashion designs and graphic arts. The Career Exploration passage involves working in a setting which might lead to a career. It is not unusual for students to learn from the experience that a particular career is not for them.

*PERSONNEL*

A complex array of resources and opportunities is available to the members of the Mountain Open High School community. The most important of these are the people involved who make the program go and enable the students to progress on their journey through the program. They are the teachers, (including counselling personnel, library staff and volunteers) and the other important school staff like the cafeteria manager, the custodian and the secretary. The purpose of this section is to outline the personnel resources of the school.

All employees in the school serve as resource persons. There were few social or professional distinctions separating members of the support team, and students tend to lump together all school adults as "staff" or "teachers". This practice, aside from its obvious social benefits, influences the pupil teacher ratio advantageously.

Advising, in its formal sense, is performed by teachers. Providing experiences for students to build their repertoires of skills and informal advising, is done casually by most of the adults in the school regardless of the other duties they are expected to do. Providing experiences, instruction and informal support is also provided by volunteers from the neighbouring community. These people are usually called community teachers. Examples include a retired actuary who teaches remedial mathematics, a former diplomat-soldier who tutors in foreign languages and a musician who helps students tune and maintain the student-built harpsichord.

It may be useful at this stage to consider some of the ways in which helping personnel interact with students. Because of the central importance of the formal advising function, it is treated separately from the more general experiential/instructional function.

Each student has an advisor selected from the professionally certified staff. The advisor-advisee relationship is a close one which continues through the student's entire program. When serious conflict or mis-

understanding mar this relationship beyond reasonable hope of repair, a change of advisor may be made. One half-day each week is reserved for advisor-advisee meetings. That time is often spent in small groups with private meetings as needed. Regardless of the scheduled time for advisee group meetings, teachers and students tended to be opportunistic about finding additional or alternative times to talk together. The teachers also have established information exchange networks (see descriptions of staff meetings and staff lunch) for sharing concerns and insights about the status of individual students.

All adults, including community teachers, offer courses, classes or activities. The offerings are normally made in nine-week blocks, and range from remedial work in reading or writing, the traditional school subjects like biology, history and calculus, to arts, crafts or dance. Students sometimes offer classes too, a distinction of considerable pride and satisfaction. The point here is that through the advising process students are able to understand their needs, and through the rich array of opportunities, students are able to get the experiences and practice they require to meet the program goals and build their futures.

Helping persons already mentioned, along with others, also form a special group for special cases. When a student encounters severe difficulty, one that cannot be resolved in the advising process, a support group may be formed, consisting of the student, the advisor, one or both parents, the principal, and such other persons as may be especially significant to the student including the possibility of a friend, an admired student, a case worker and so on. Support groups are created and function for special cases and needs.

Students who are working on *Passages* relate to a particular group for each passage. This group is called the *Passage Committee* and includes one or more passage advisors (teachers with specific responsibility for monitoring a particular type of passage), a student who has already completed that particular passage, the student's advisor and any other

person of the student's choice. Passage committees must approve students' passage proposals and evaluate the terminal reports or products.

*FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES*

This section describes the physical arrangements of the school and the way in which activities are organized.

The school is located off the beaten track in a rambling residential community, a location well suited to the nature of the program. The main building is old, rather ramshackle at first sight, but bearing signs of careful maintenance and frequent adaptation for the needs of the school community. A sketch map is given in Figure 3 on page 22. The outbuildings include a greenhouse (student built) and a "temporary" structure housing food service facilities, meeting rooms and instructional space. The main building has general purpose rooms, a laboratory, library, gymnasium, recording studio, offices and a surprisingly large number of small nooks and crannies, often equipped with an old overstuffed chair, or desk and chair.

In school parlance the name of an activity may be the same as the name of the place in which it occurs. For example, a student might answer the question, "Where are you going?" With the words "I have Munchie now." The response specifies both the activity, work in food service, and the place, Munchie. Thus in the following description the names of activities and of rooms or facilities are often the same.

The school has an ongoing commitment to four special features: Sundance, Munchie, Trips and Governance. In the minds of some students, Recording Studio is also a major feature. Similarly, for some staff members, the presence of a Pre-school within the building is another promising if undeveloped resource. Let's look at each briefly.

Sundance is the name for the solar greenhouse, used for learning about horticulture, gardening and solar heating. There are ambitious projects around the greenhouse and gardens. It is possible, however, that interest in Sundance was lagging and that its presence as a central focus of the school community may decline.

In a similar way, Munchie is a major innovative commitment which is central to school life. Munchie is both the name of the food-service facility, and of the course in which students, under the guidance of the food service manager, arrange menus, cook and attend to all the dishes and clean-up. Students also serve the food and handle the cash.

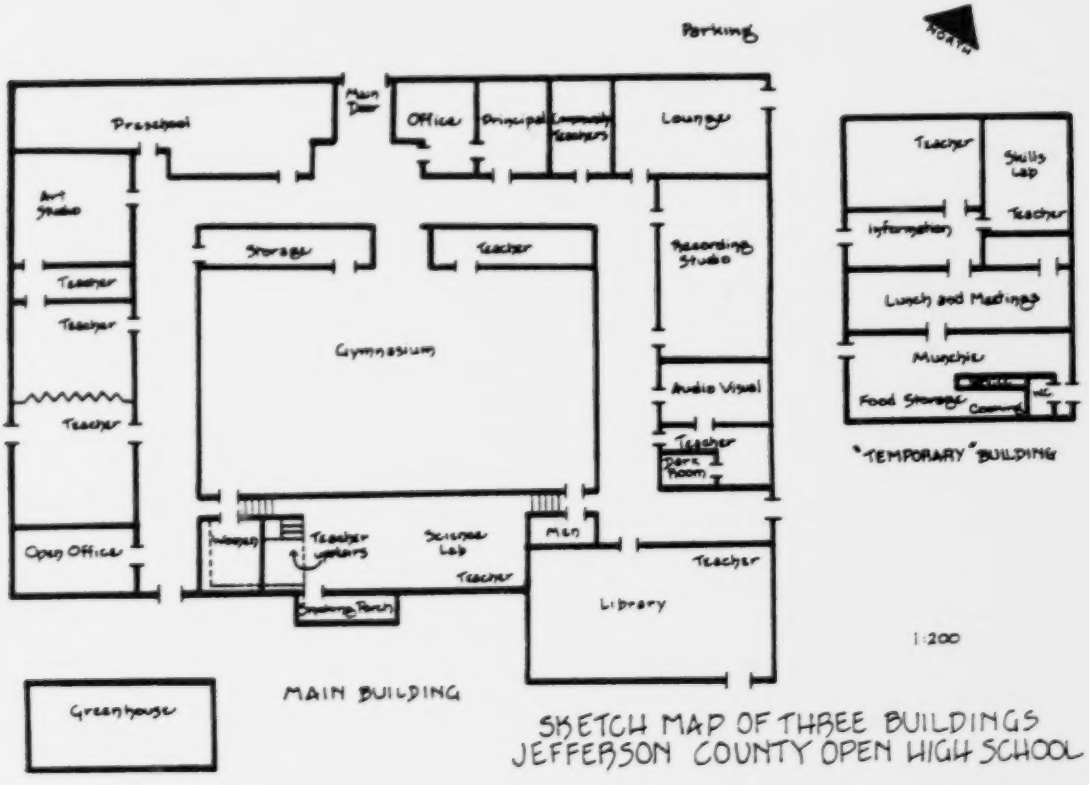


**Figure 3. Floor Plan Sketch, Mountain Open High School.**

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Every student is expected to work in Munchie at some time and, like everything else that students do, it counts as a learning experience, is evaluated, and teaches pre-walkabout skills. Thus Munchie has status as a course and is lifted well beyond the usual context of kitchen-duty. Like Sundance, it is not always easy to get the numbers of students needed to make Munchie work properly. There are often a number of helpers eager to serve the food and take in the money, but these students had not necessarily been involved in the preparation or clean-up stages.

Trips are an important part of the school's educational offerings, although some students may not be involved in many outings. The first excursions away from school occur in *Beginnings*. Subsequent journeys go to places such as the Boundary Canoe Waters, Calgary, The Baja, and an annual work trip which provides a community service, usually in Mexico. (A work trip is described in Chapter Six.) There are small numbers of students on any given trip and the planning usually takes a major part of their instructional time prior to departure. Each trip forms the central event and focus for language and social studies teaching. Students must make provision for costs, shelter, food, and health care while on the road. Similarly, they must prepare to deal with the consequences of close social contacts while travelling and the need to maintain good working relationships with others on the trip. Finally, the students must be ready to demonstrate the specific learning they gained from the trip. *Trips* is made possible by using the money normally spent on athletics in other schools, to buy and maintain vans. Expenses are borne personally by staff and students alike, although some collective fund-raising activities are undertaken.

The fourth central feature is Governance, referring to the set of activities through which the community governs itself and makes the collective decisions so critical in the students' reports of their commitment to the school. Each Monday morning Governance is held in the library for

roughly an hour and a half. Agendas tend to be very full and important. The meetings are organized and run by students who are part of a group called "Leadership". The function of Governance is critical in the life of the school and so clearly reveals the underlying values in action that a separate section will be devoted to describing it. (See Chapter Three.)

Other activities rival these four central ones in importance and opportunities for students. They are Recording Studio, Community Learnings, Public Relations and a number of others that appear to be more opportunistic than organized. Recording Studio is both a place and an activity. There is a rather large room equipped with excellent recording facilities including control room and space for fairly elaborate group productions. The room is heavily booked as it also serves as an ideal meeting space when media are to be used. There is a well defined group of students who have special musical interests and skills who spend much of their time in or around the studio. The use of the control room is carefully regulated and monitored by staff or students with special competence and responsibility for the facility. The Recording Studio is an attractive feature in bringing students to the school.

Community Learnings refers to placing students in the community for a variety of work experiences. This is a pre-walkabout activity and varies in duration and extent from person to person. The Community Learnings bring the school and the community interests together, provide the students with valuable experience and skills and sometimes establishes the foundation for a more major study of an occupation by a student in a Career Exploration passage.

Public Relations is a course which is offered in all time blocks. It deals in practical terms with institutional relations outside the school. The practical experience leads to lively discussion on various topics such as how

the school projects a fair image of itself. The Public Relations class is guardian of the school's recruiting efforts and custodians of a slide show known perversely as "The Dog and Pony Show", so named in honour of a county administrator's characterization of the high school as a "dog and pony show".

Other activities provide valuable experience and responsibility for students. The Pre-School affords a chance to work helpfully with young children. Students may assist in the school office. Such activities enable students to gain competence in some of the pre-walkabout skills.

The lack of an officially organized athletic program forces the students to set up their own teams and arrange games (e.g. volleyball). The gymnasium space is easily available. Fitness sessions are regularly scheduled.

There are more or less formal studies that students take occasionally in other schools or institutions. For example, a student who wished to study machine shop when it was unavailable at Mountain Open could arrange to do so at a neighbouring high school. Students can also audit courses at a Community College within the region.

Other educational institutions make it possible for students to attend single courses to fill in gaps. This variable, individualized placement of students in other schools according to their interests and needs is an important adjunct to the program which makes accessible much more learning than is available within the walls of Mountain Open High School itself. It also promotes practice in using the resources most frequently available in the region for life long learning.

A final instance exemplifies the way in which apparent adversity in facilities is turned into a learning opportunity: The school's main building is rather old and dilapidated. The central administration has been unable to find funds for urgent roof repairs. This entire situation has been described to students and staff, both to publicize the problem and to enlist a team to work with the Principal in considering a wide array of options. This exemplifies a critical issue in the life of the which, even though unplanned, is used as a learning experience. Community resources and pressures mobilized in ways that make students full partners for problem-solving.

CHAPTER THREE

# SOME SCHOOL ROUTINES

The purpose of this chapter is to describe six important events in the operation of the school. Staff meetings, staff lunches and Governance meetings are central to decision-making and morale in the school. Advising, evaluation and graduation are important routine events which drive the program and celebrate its ultimate success. These events also reveal details about how the program is implemented, monitored and adjusted.

## *STAFF MEETING*

Wednesday morning was set aside for the weekly staff meeting. There were two things that I wanted to witness: One was the staff meeting process; the other was the events and activities going on in the school while the staff was in its session.

I made several slow circuits of the school during the course of Wednesday morning, stopping to spend a little time wherever there was something happening and ambling on otherwise. It seemed likely that the lounge would be heavily populated in the absence of the teachers, but it had no more action than usual. There were varying numbers of people (from five to fifteen) using it during the morning. In the gymnasium a brisk pick-up basketball game was going on which gave way after an hour to the International Dance Class, initiated by a senior student and then taken over by the Community Teacher who normally offers it. Five students were in individual nooks and corners reading or typing. Other individually isolated students included a ferocious looking boy dressed in biker's garb, collating papers in the Principal's Office, and another person tuning the school's harpsichord, a task that had to stop when the music for Dance Class started in the neighbouring gymnasium. Two students were developing film in the photography centre adjacent to the laboratory. The

smoking porch had a steady trickle of patrons, as had the coffee and snacks station in Munchie. An instrumental group was setting up in the Recording Studio. The lunch preparation crew was getting started.

Meanwhile, a student was in the library drafting a batik design for her creativity passage. Three other students asked her a flood of questions about the method to be used to control the dyes in the batik. When it became plain that she wanted to get on with the task, the visitors left. Later the batik worker also moved on leaving the library in use by six other students working silently at individual carrels or tables.

**Figure 4. Working on a Creativity Passage.**

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Of course this does not account for all of the students, nor for all of the places they could be. A number would have been involved with some community activity that day, and the senior students would have been away from school on walkabout passages in any event. No doubt there were some who were simply idle. The point is that, in the absence of direct teacher supervision, the school program was functioning in it's usual way without protective or custodial supervision. On other staff meeting days, I repeated the observations and found the foregoing picture to be typical.

The staff meeting began at eight a.m. in a room adjoining Munchie. All available adults concerned with the school, including custodial and cafeteria staff, secretary and community volunteers were present along with the teachers. Parents could also attend, as could staff from other schools. One meeting I attended included a counsellor from the neighbouring high school.

The meeting was chaired by a teacher and the first business involved exchanging information about students. Students discussed were normally having trouble of some kind, usually related to absenteeism or lack of commitment and performance in the program. All available information about the student's situation both at school and at home was brought out and closure of any case normally occurred when a teacher, most often the student's advisor, agreed to pursue the matter with the student. Most of the troubled cases involved difficult or non-existent home life and it became clear that this was one of the prevailing and dominant sources of trouble for students throughout the county.

However, not all cases were causes for concern. There were reports of triumph such as a previously troubled student making excellent progress. Some of these reports informed staff about progress with concerns raised previously. Others were statements given in response to questions asked in the general form, "I haven't seen so-and-so for a long time. What's she doing?"

In addition to the individual teacher's decision to pursue a particular case and report back, there were other kinds of closure in the first phase of the meeting. In one case it became clear that a support group needed to be formed to help a student work through his problem and consider the wisdom of his continuing in school. The composition of the support group was talked over: the advisor and the principal agreed to start the process. In another case, the substantive issue (seeking relief from being banned from trips for six months because of drug use in school) led to a brief but intense discussion of the policy itself, the motives behind it, the importance of the appeal mechanism and the role of the school in advancing the students' growth in responsible morality.

The staff meeting however was not a policy-making or legislative assembly and the issue was not pursued. But valuable notice was served of the need to have such policies and practices governing behaviour under continual scrutiny especially in maintaining their consistency with school values. The particular case of sanctions against drug use had opened a much more general debate which would go on for some time and eventually surface in the form of policy recommendations to be considered by the entire school community.

The second phase of the staff meeting was open to students. Here information of a less confidential nature was exchanged. Hopes, plans and fears for the future were discussed ranging from the probable usefulness and success of selling tickets for a special professional basketball game to scheduling the use and maintenance of the school vans. Students came to this phase of the meeting and made proposals for activities or asked for help or opinions about undertakings (not *Passages*) they had in mind. Requirements of the County central administration (e.g. a mandatory achievement test) were discussed and acted upon. In short, the ongoing day-to-day operation and management of the enterprise was maintained in this part of the meeting.

The meeting being described was a long one due to a heavy agenda. There were evidences of fatigue in increased trips to the coffee station in Munchie next door and in flagging attention to the issue on the table. On the other hand, the overall impression of the group dynamics in the staff meeting was very favourable. There appeared to be no dominance of the meeting by any individual or sub-group. The atmosphere was marked by good humour and careful listening to what was being said. These did not inhibit sharp expressions of disagreement. There was no apparent distinction in status among those present and I came away feeling that I had witnessed a fine example of democracy in action amongst mature and caring people. In this way the staff meeting performed four important functions for the school: trouble shooting, maintenance of routine operations, stimuli for advance planning and maintenance of staff morale.

*STAFF LUNCH*

The staff also met less formally at lunch time one day a week, not Wednesday. Staff lunch was held in the Skills Lab, a room adjoining Munchie, and was much more social in its tone than was the staff meeting. For example, at one lunch a teacher on leave from the school dropped in with his newly born daughter to show around. All the same, having everyone together provided opportunities to informally exchange information. The main topics of business were planning details: arranging time for administration of a standardized test, finding someone to take a van for an oil-change, finding relief for a teacher who was being urged to take a day off. The weekly staff lunch seemed to me to be very important, not only in providing an exchange of professional information, but also in supporting teachers who otherwise work alone. The value of such support will be apparent in the discussion of staff fatigue. (See Chapter Eight.)

*GOVERNANCE*

I attended four weekly meetings of Governance and confirmed for myself that the sessions worked in the way pictured by Gibbons (1976, p130) characterized by control of program by participants. The meetings were chaired by students, members of a group called "Leadership", whose functions included setting the Governance agendas and monitoring communal issues within the school and the wider community. The meetings were attended by most of the staff and students in the school at the time.

By design, Governance developed corporate responsibility in students through making collective decisions to support or undertake particular activities. The activities included organizing social service ventures, like helping abused children, and planning special classes, like ones dealing with human sexuality, for example. Other events included requests for an audience, like an outside group who wished to speak to students about world peace, and the purely recreational, like arranging an all-school ski day as a break prior to the onslaught of a new intake of beginners in mid-January. The proposals for these things came equally from students and from staff. The discussions were thorough and most decisions seemed to emerge by consensus although voting was used to confirm the general assent, or dissent, to any proposal.

One incident so clearly captures the spirit and function of Governance in feeding the students' growing sense of power and commitment that I describe it now to epitomize the process. It was an attempt to modify the program initiated by a student.

The senior student, not one of my interviewees, rose in Governance and proposed formally that some of the pre-walkabout skills be removed from the compulsory core list, and be placed on the lists of prerequisites for certain passages. In essence, the proposal rearranged the taxonomy of the pre-walkabout skills, and reflected a different value system from the one in use when the existing set of skill requirements was established. I

was impressed that a student should initiate such a change and be taken seriously. There was an extended and sometimes heated debate involving about ten or twelve students and three or four staff ending when the chairman remembered that potential program changes must wait over a week and be publicized. The resolution of the proposal was delayed and unfortunately I had to miss the next meeting. But two weeks later, in the lounge, I met the student who started it all and asked how his idea had fared. He grinned and told me that it had been utterly rejected. I expressed mild surprise that he took it so cheerfully and he replied that it seemed like a good idea at the time, but now he wasn't so sure. Besides, last year he and some friends had successfully made a major program adjustment and you "couldn't expect to win them all."

In ways like these, through Governance, the students become bound to the program and intimately involved in the routine operation of the school. Furthermore, with participation in the process to make changes as they seemed to be needed by everyone concerned, commitment of both staff and students grew.

*ADVISING*

My informants agreed that the advisory system was the single most critical component of the school's operation. For the students, the advisory system was their first and single most important line of support. The students felt very close to their advisors, and always expressed distress in the few cases in which the relationship had broken down. They felt that their advisor was a person with whom they could discuss any aspect of their lives in relation to work at school, and on whom they could count for a friendly, if demanding, listener. Furthermore, there was a sacrosanct time each week set aside for access to advisors. Interestingly, the teachers felt the same way. The advising system was an effective way for teachers to reach students, first their own advisees, and second, other students through the cross-over network provided by the Staff Meeting.

Friday morning was the time reserved for advising. Other events were not scheduled at this time and each advisor, in consultation with advisees, determined how best to use the time. The set of advisees for any teacher was mixed with respect to age and gender and this allowed for useful meetings of the entire advisee group. Older students discussed common difficulties and needs in the presence of the younger and frequently were able to share experience with them. At other occasions, the advisor would meet privately with individuals.

Luck gave me a prime example of the subtlety and the recognition of experience typical of the advising methods in the school. I was recording a conversation with a teacher when a student burst in excitedly and breathlessly with news that wouldn't wait. Having learned to be patient and tolerant of those kinds of events I just waited. The tape recorder did the rest.

> Interviewer: Hi.
>
> Teacher: Hi Mary:
>
> Mary: Am I disturbing you? I just wanted to throw something at you, real quick. I have this wonderful idea.
>
> Interviewer: It won't wait. (They laugh.)
>
> Mary: You know the article you have up there, on hitch-hiking? Well comin' home from school I got picked up by these two guys that were telling me about this system they do in Hungary? Where hitch-hikers carry around a certificate, kind of a licence to hitch-hike. And people who want to pick up hitch-hikers have to get one also. And then when they pick somebody up (whew!), the hitchhiker gives them a kind of token. And the person who picks them up can go and cash 'em in. They say it's cut down on rape and murder and other terrifying incidents... that occur along with hitch-hiking. An' I was reading that article an I wanna do some research on their system that they have over there and see if I can do something about gettin' somethin' like that started around here.

Teacher: What a good idea. How are you going to start?

Mary: Hmm. I'm gonna talk to Arnie [the principal] and see if he knows how I can write to the Hungarian Government or somebody over there who can give me more information on it... (pause) ... I thought of it this morning it as I was walking down the road to stick my thumb out.

Interviewer: There's likely a Hungarian Embassy in Washington.

Teacher: That's a good idea. Start in America.

Mary: Yeah. You know, because I saw that article and I've had some of those things... Well, I haven't been raped or anything but... I've run into some of the perverts of the road. And just by slight luck managed to get out of it, you know. A lot of people don't. And they say that they have very little of that goin' on over there. So I wanna find out about it and see if I could help get something like that started here in the States.

Teacher: Good idea.

Mary: That'd be far out. Considering what I ran into trying to get home from Florida.

Teacher: Yeah.

Mary: Cause there are a lot of people that do long distance hitch-hiking. But I gotta go to class. I just wanted to spring that on ya, and see what ya thought.

Teacher: Yeah. I have a compliment for you I'll tell you later.

Mary: Okay. (They laugh) I love compliments.

Teacher: I thought so.

At this point Mary left us and I was able to get the rest of the story. Mary was an advisee of the teacher and an inveterate hitch-hiker who had had some near misses with disaster. The article had been placed on the

bulletin board specifically with Mary in mind. And now the bait had been taken, and instead of repeated admonitions and prohibitions concerning a hazardous practice, there was a positive response with potential for much learning.

*EVALUATION AND GRADUATION*

Through the interaction of people and facilities students learn the skills and knowledge needed before starting *Passages*. More importantly, the students are engaged in making decisions of the kind made by responsible adults. But those desirable ends don't necessarily come from spending an hour a day helping in Pre-school and two hours a day in Recording Studio. Experience is converted to learning through thought and reflection. And high school students won't necessarily learn at their best without a climate of challenge and expectation to do so. These considerations surface most clearly through the school's evaluative methods.

Fundamentally, the students at Mountain County Open High School are responsible for performing and documenting their own evaluations. Indeed, the word "evaluation" is school language for the process of thought and writing through which students assess the gains they made and the learning accomplished in any given activity. It is important to repeat that any and all activities are to be evaluated and keyed to the list of skill objectives. Thus, working on harpsichord construction, like being a member of Leadership, and like organizing a floor hockey tournament, are activities that count provided the student writes an evaluation that is validated by a responsible person who witnessed the activity and can be convinced that the evaluation makes sense.

The pre-walkabout skills are evaluated at three levels: knowledge, experience and competence. The knowledge level implies awareness only. The experience level requires the students to have performed the skill in several contexts and to be able to explain it simply. The level of competence is understood to mean that the student is confident in using the skill, in teaching it to others, in extending the skill as required and in proving competency as through a standardized test where appropriate. Students are required to achieve competence in all the skills. In this way, repetition is given an honourable place as one's first attempt at a skill might generate the knowledge level and several more practices would be needed to move through experience to competence. The written evaluations enable and require the student to prepare validated documentation of each one. Subsequently, that documentation forms a record from which students prepare their transcripts.

As will appear later, the writing of evaluations and transcripts is one of the most difficult tasks that students are called upon to do. They are not always done well. And they frequently form one of the commonest topics of discussion between advisors and advisees. Accordingly, evaluations constitute a critically important tool at Mountain Open High School.

The evaluation of *Passages* is handled a little differently as the completion of each passage must be approved by the passage committee. The completed passage must also be presented publicly. Nevertheless, the learning and growth accomplished on a passage is written up, validated and becomes an important part of the student's record.

Graduation takes a form very different from regular secondary schools. When a student has established the documentation of the entire program, showing competence in all the skills listed and completion of all six passages, the graduation ceremony is planned. Normally the writing of the transcript and graduation ceremony details are worked out in a class appropriately called "Graduation." The ceremony itself is custom-

designed for each graduate and includes as guests those who contributed to the student's work throughout the program. Teachers, fellow students, parents, volunteers and graduates may be included. The ceremony refers to and celebrates the graduate's accomplishments and readiness to function effectively in the world. The official school leaving certificate is presented, usually by a person chosen by the student. This intensely personal and festive end of the program celebrates and supports the view that the program is a rite of passage to adulthood.

CHAPTER FOUR

# CHALLENGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Walkabout, on paper, is a workable curriculum. But how does it appear to the students for whom it was intended? What do they make of it? And to what extent, in their eyes, does school life approach the intentions of the curriculum? In the next three chapters I will try to answer such questions by drawing a composite picture of the life of the school mostly using things the students told me. This chapter deals with the students' views of challenges, risks, responsibility and freedom in the program.

## *CHALLENGE*

Students could not understand my questions in the form, "What's hard about this school?" Or, "What are you doing now that's difficult for you?" But after conversation around the point, a question in the form, "What are the challenges for you in this school?" brought fuller answers. Some students attend Mountain Open High School, I learned, not because they especially wanted the Walkabout program but to escape intolerable and unhappy situations in conventional schools. These students were motivated more by evading difficulties than by seeing challenges to be addressed. All informants agreed that the initiation of new students through *Beginnings* and *Learning to Learn* was critically important in making it possible for them to recognize and respond to challenge.

The most significant difficulty that all students found was the abundance of apparently free time. They were expected to take on the activities, courses and workshops that would extend their skills, meet their needs and empower them to complete *Passages*. The drive to attend sessions, to organize work and leisure, and generally make productive use of their time had to come from the student. In the jargon of education, *intrinsic motivation* was demanded. Students found self starting the first and one of the greatest challenges of the Walkabout program.

Almost every interview contained expressions of anger, or irritation at the least, that people (always other than the speaker) "goofed off" so much and failed to take advantage of the opportunities of the program. I was able to observe some of these same students in prolonged periods of idleness in which it was quite clear that their ire was probably aimed at themselves in part. In a few cases, I was able to talk to students about the value of controlling their own use of time. It appeared to be a very important, probably critical, feature. The students who found managing their own time a problem had very little practice in doing it. Their descriptions of previous schooling were full of instances of teacher management and control. They had no reason to believe that Mountain Open High School would be any different when it came to use of time. Thus the first major challenge, after finishing the preparative stages, was facing the fact that no matter how long you sat around, no one else was going to make you to get up and go. It took some students longer in idleness than others to become totally convinced that the school required them to take charge of their lives.

At this point, it is essential to remember that each student had a very close relationship with an advisor and a weekly meeting in which motivation problems could be discussed. The challenge of using free time wisely is loaded with paradox. It seems backwards that time must be wasted, as it were, in order to learn how not to waste time. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that a lot of time must be spent poorly in order to learn to spend it more wisely. It is also a paradox that the advisors, who see so clearly what is happening, may not intervene directly but must be oblique and indirect in helping students to find in themselves the discipline to manage their own work.

This ultimate paradox was exemplified by Lucille, a student in her second year in the school, who had arranged to transfer into a conventional high school at the next semester. Lucille told me earnestly about the laxness of the Mountain Open High School program. She claimed the school was very slack and that it did not provide the direction and structure she re-

quired. When I asked her what had brought those facts home to her she relaxed and launched into a long, laudatory description of "how much she had learned" at the school.

She described the need "to be aggressive" not in an interpersonal sense, but in the sense of pushing herself forward into opportunities and experiences. She outlined her mistakes, failures of motivation and responsibility, and indicated how valuable those errors had been within the supportive climate of the school. She told me how much more productive her present semester was. All the same, those positive values were not sufficiently strong to impede her decision to seek a less challenging and more regulated pattern of education.

The Walkabout program proper with its six passages, challenged the students profoundly. Debra and Marie both dwelt upon the difficulty of meeting the exacting demands of their passage committees, and of the feeling that, here at last, they were entirely "on their own." Yet both felt proud and excited by their progress, albeit slow. Pat was more explicit. He identified the chief challenges as finding an initial idea for a passage and then converting it into a feasible plan of action. Writing a passage proposal to achieve the specific goal was especially difficult for Pat. Similarly, Andy found that the demands on imagination and his ability to be totally committed were the greatest challenges in *Passages*. Andy added that he found challenge in the need to deal independently with people while planning and performing a passage.

Students in the pre-walkabout phase anticipated the difficulties of the *Passages* with mixtures of trepidation and high hopes. But their immediate challenges came from independent time management, as noted above, and from the difficulty of meeting the demand of the program for students to evaluate their own work.

The school requires that students write a short statement which evaluates their learning in any given activity. The statement is to be keyed to the list

of pre-walkabout skills. The statement must be validated by a responsible person who has witnessed the student's work and who agrees with the learning claims being made. The challenge for the students lies in the common notion that evaluation is something that one person does to another, not something that one does for one's self. A second difficulty comes from the fact that the evaluations do not yield any immediate reward at the end of a piece of work. It is the accumulation of evaluations, which are proof of competence in the pre-walkabout skills, that permits entry into Walkabout itself. And similarly, it is difficult for students to foresee the distant day of graduation for which a transcript, summarizing one's entire learning career, must be prepared. The file of evaluations together with journals, logs and notes are essential documents which each student must have at hand when writing the transcript.

Several students showed me their files of accumulated evaluations and it was easy to see the progress made from halting and inarticulate early attempts to much more fluent and reasonable claims in the recent ones. The point is that students seemed to find it very hard to see the future need. This was confirmed when I attended a couple of sessions of the workshop entitled "Graduation." The main thrust at the time was to write transcripts. Some of the students in the class had given me interviews and we exchanged knowing looks as other students found that they were lacking crucial evaluation statements. Similarly, much of the work of the advisors was devoted to helping students find the motivation to complete their evaluations.

Students rarely spoke of challenges in the abstract. Normally they gave specific instances of things that they or their friends found challenging. An exception was Andy, soon to graduate, who said that all challenges could be reduced to coming to know yourself and finding the inner strength to do what needed doing. Here was an excellent but rare example of the student reflecting in general terms upon the process of his education. The concrete detail of challenges described by Andy and the others were compatible with his generalization.

Students also responded to my questions about the demands of the school in terms of risk. They recognized the risk of failure although no one seemed much afraid of it. The physical risks of the *Adventure Passages* were well controlled and did not appear to be excessive threats. Some students were particularly aware of risks to their self-esteem. They felt that the school climate encouraged them to run such risks by speaking up for an unpopular point of view, or attempting a new activity even though there was a chance of failure.

Mark expressed his ideas about the value of risk-taking in the program this way: "I think that you constantly need to be putting yourself out on a limb, taking new risks. The more experiences that you have creates a better person." When asked for specific examples from his own education Mark described his negotiations with a neighbouring conventional high school to arrange tournaments and participation in their competetive athletic events. He also cited his selection of a course in fine arts as an example of "extending himself" beyond his favourite maths and sciences. Like Mark, several other students told me that they had deliberately chosen course work in distasteful subjects. Juanita, a student strongly oriented toward the arts, summarized her view of the risks found in the school. They included, "trying new things...speaking out on what you believe in and conquering new areas that you wouldn't have suspected that you could do..." For Juanita, the value of a risk-taking climate was that "it broadens your expectations of what you can be and what you can learn." She mentioned, as an example, her work in a recent election campaign. Politics, both in theory and in practice, had meant little to her. But under the stimulus of her *Global Awareness Passage* she had joined the campaign of a candidate whose platform seemed attractive, and performed a host of novel tasks ranging from envelope stuffing, to carrying a sandwich board and issuing flyers at rush hour in a large city shopping mall. For many people, these things may not seem to be risks, but for a young person who had been largely sheltered, it was risky indeed to publicly solicit votes for a controversial political candidate.

As a final instance of risk within the program, here is the case of Bill and the International Dance Workshop. One day I stopped by the gym to watch the dance class prepare for a public presentation scheduled for the next week. The group as a whole, about ten or twelve, seemed quite skilled as they worked their ways through the intricacies of a Middle Eastern round dance which, starting slowly, accelerated to wild and bewildering speed. Some of the dancers were impressive. But one young man caught my eye. He stumbled as the pace increased and recovering for a while, tangled himself again. Why would anyone submit voluntarily to being the awkward member of the group? Why would the group, especially with public display imminent, tolerate such a stumbler? And how would the instructor, a community teacher, or the class as a whole, deal with the problem? Would the response be appropriate to Walkabout? It seemed to me that the student was risking major embarrassment, that the dance class was too, and I wanted to learn more about it.

**Figure 5. International Dance Class.**



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As I watched, the complex figure collapsed and the dance failed. The instructor regained attention and asked everyone to rehearse the movements individually and slowly. She moved from person to person helping here and there but spending a little more time, unobtrusively, with the awkward one. A few students helped and corrected each other. In about five minutes, the dance was started again. This time the young man did distinctly better. But eventually the demands of the dance exceeded his motor coordination and this time his entanglement was total. He dropped from the circle and walked away, heavy headed. I thought I had witnessed failure happening in the school.

Events did not follow the prediction. This time the instructor set the group to other tasks and worked exclusively with the difficult student. At that point I had to leave the gym. But an hour later the same student, with a friend, accosted me in the hall, and after some preliminary small talk offered to be interviewed. In the course of the interview Bill, the student in question, told me how he came to be in the dance group and how he felt about the morning's work. In his account he exactly confirmed my impressions and therefore completed the story. Here is his account in transcript form.

> Bill: We're starting up a band and I wanted to find out what kinds of music we could do. I was walking by the gym one day and I decided to stop in because I heard this weird music. I thought it was cool! And there was Bob in there, doing that Egyptian dance. And the teacher let me get in on one of the dances even though I wasn't in the class. It was real fun. And I needed the exercise. I thought, 'I'm taking this.'
>
> Bob: It's fun. It's great.
>
> Interviewer: I could see you really having a fine time. As I watched that round dance there seemed to be people that were much more skilled than others. There was a variety of skill levels.
>
> Bill: I was the one you probably saw messing up.

(They both laugh.)

Interviewer: Yes. In the second time through, when the instructor was out of the circle, you kind of stepped out when it got real fast.

Bill: Yeah.

Interviewer: And I noticed shortly after, that she was talking to you about some of the things you could do. I said to myself, 'Well it looks to me like that person's not being made to feel badly about leaving the circle.' Am I right about that? Or did you feel badly?

Bill: You're completely right about that. At first I felt bad that I couldn't get the steps down, because when I stepped out of the set you notice I went, 'Tsk..darn!' like that. (He gestures).

Interviewer: Yes.

Bill: But then I worked with the steps. Those are pretty hard steps, too, for a beginner, you know. And I worked with the steps with Bob and some other people. I finally did it!

Interviewer: Isn't that great?

Bill: Yeah. I got the whole thing one time. And I felt really great. And the teacher was praising me on that.

I have quoted my conversation with Bill at length because it seems to epitomize the general student view of challenge in the program. There was complete agreement that challenges abound. But there was sharp disagreement among students about the degree of exposure and vulnerability they felt in accepting the challenges. Some felt that not only was it all right to "stick out your neck" but there would be somebody to help with the repairs if your head was cut off. Debra described her sense of safety within a challenging climate, "There's so much security, and love, and learning .... All the good stuff here." Whereas Lucille, while acknowledging the supportive staff expressed discomfort with the degree of challenge, and sought the security of a regular high school program. "A traditional high school's a much safer place. It's a strong security place for them (i.e. students). There's always people telling them what to do and

where to go. It's not like that here." Thus in events both large and small, from the students' first days at the school through to the final preparation for graduation, students find themselves challenged but supported in the ventures and risks that must precede the kind of growth that they are

*INDEPENDENCE AND RESPONSIBILITY*

The major challenges for the students arise from the program's expectation that they act independently and responsibly. Students must decide how they are going to use their time and must accept responsibility for their decisions. The decision to select and execute a particular walkabout passage is strictly up to each individual provided it meets the requirements of the passage committee. Students are obliged to be autonomous, within a supportive climate, in choosing the courses, trips and workshops that will increase their pre-walkabout skills, and they are solely responsible for evaluating and documenting their accomplishments.

Students tended to describe this broad assignment of responsibility as freedom. Marie, a new student, expressed these ideas as making it necessary for her "to prove to my parents that I can handle the freedom here." In general, the students were very much aware of the combination of independence and responsibility. A number told me that their original conception of the school was that it involved freedom alone. Other informants attributed this erroneous impression of unrestrained licence to most entering students, but not themselves. Here again the importance of *Beginnings* and *Learning to Learn* was emphasized, especially by those who had been convinced to change their expectations. Mark described the need to take personal responsibility, not only for his own progress, but also for the welfare of the entire school. He even extended his sense of personal responsibility to "doing something about the Government." Debra said, "you have to have a lot of independent strength and motivation." Marie, who earlier had described the challenge of dealing with freedom, later added the other component. "You're responsible for your education ... for keeping your journal ... for getting the skills right ..."

Juanita summarized the sense of responsibility with independence felt by most students, saying the school required you "to get to know yourself and to develop your own education," and that "the teachers ask important questions and expect you to start asking them of yourself. You start to develop obligations."

The pattern of growth in responsibility as described by the students is very much from the self, outward to a broader context. The younger students concentrated their comments entirely on themselves, but the seniors tended to express a conviction that they had communal responsibilities as well. Bob and Bill, first year students, represented younger students. Bob identified self-discipline as a critical requirement for success in the school and claimed that the full responsibility for education was his own. Bill emphasized the point by stating the converse, namely that it was not the teachers' responsibility because the consequences of irresponsibility are one's own. Bob added, "The traditional school is strong on control... what they did here was they took out the control and gave us trust. And it seems to work a lot better because you have to motivate yourself." Bill then shifted to a more altruistic position. He added that the school helps people to develop conscience and gave examples of conscience at work, not in respect to his obligations to himself, but rather about his obligations to others. Andy and Juanita both revealed the older students' tendencies to accept responsibility beyond their own immediate concerns. For Andy, it was expressed as an obvious requirement that he help new students to "catch on" by being helpful to the teachers. Juanita more precisely identified the same idea in terms of a role model and illustrated it specifically in her participation as a student aide in *Beginnings* and *Learning to Learn*. "You develop obligations to classes and to main functions and being part of the school. The school demands a little bit more of you in being ... a role model."

It was clear in the students' accounts how the school nurtured the growing acceptance of responsibility beyond self. It was also clear that this phenomenon engendered a strong feeling of commitment and ownership

towards the program. Governance was probably the single strongest event in building responsibility. The students I interviewed did not identify it as such directly, but several did allude to feeling satisfied with the program because of having a voice in it's structure. "It's our school and our program," was the way Pat put it.

A practice of the school that also made students exercise responsibilities beyond their own selfish interests was the presence of students on the committees that hire teachers. Both teachers and students told me about this unusual practice. Several students who had been on hiring committees told me about the things they looked for in a teacher. These insights will be described more fully in the section on personal relationships between teachers and students (Chapter Five). Suffice it here to say that students who have been on hiring committees necessarily must take responsibility for their choice of teachers. And in the same way, it was recognized that all teachers were cleared by a committee which included a significant number of students. The teachers described the hiring committee procedure from another perspective, and the accounts from both sides of the table showed how a binding web of mutual responsibility can grow.

Finally, several students told me about the effect of the school rules on their notions of independence and responsibility. Informants were impressed that the school had only three rules, all of them prohibitive and very simple: No drinking; no drugs; no sex. The students experienced a strong sense of independence through these simple and apparently reasonable restraints. It is interesting that they did not see the restriction of smoking to the smoking porch , nor the limited hours of coffee and snack service in Munchie as "rules." Here was evidence of the absence of imposition and the assumption of responsibility.

My own impression, that student independence and responsibility formed the backbone of the school's work, grew steadily. Early on, I was aware that if the growth of these qualities was successful, then students close

to graduation should feel entirely confident and ready to face their futures outside the school. I was curious to know to what extent my informants and others would reveal dependence on the Mountain Open High School structure to maintain their senses of identity and autonomy.

Senior students, when asked about their future plans, revealed an attractive combination of sturdy self-reliance and natural uncertainty. Both Andy and Debra faced the future with high hopes, some very realistic and appropriate trepidation and an appealing reluctance to leave the school. "I'm going to hate to leave this place," said Andy, "But I'm ready for it. It feels good to have found the right passage." Debra was less ready and said, half-jokingly, "Maybe there should be a weaning committee." In fairness to the program and Debra, she had something like a year's work to do before graduation and some weaning would certainly be expected to happen in that time.

Other observations suggested that it is easy for students to move out of the school into the next stage of their lives. Indeed, this was exemplified in an extreme case in which a student on a passage in a distant part of the world, acquired other interests and dropped out of the school. Here was the student, in essence completing the rite of passage independently, and promoting herself into the adult community without benefit of graduation. The broad program aim was met in any case.

CHAPTER FIVE

# GETTING ALONG IN AN EXPERIENTIAL PROGRAM

The purpose of this chapter is to show the richness of the interpersonal relationships developed in the school through the experiential nature of the program. The nature of troubles and difficulties is also described.

## *PERSONAL RELATIONS*

The previous chapter could give an impression that each person is entirely alone within the school and the program. Nothing could be further from the case. Each student's autonomy was balanced by a set of personal relationships that were equally a part of life in Mountain Open High School. The delicate trick for any school, of course, is to find the narrow zone between the tyranny of group life the barren isolation of individualization. In this section, the students describe their relationships with school-mates, teachers and with people outside the school. For many students, accounts were incomplete without stating the contrasts they had experienced in other schools, and I have included some statements of this kind.

The more junior of my informants all expressed the importance of being known and recognized in the school. They felt that they were known as individual persons, and by name, to all the staff and to most students. This important identity was attributed in part to the smallness of the population, to the deliberate practices of *Beginnings* which promote identification, and to the caring attitude of people in the school. Each informant spoke emphatically of the value of this attitude in contrast to their previous schools in which they felt largely unknown. Teachers and aides in *Beginnings* confirmed that getting to know people was a prime activity in the early stages.

Several students explained, somewhat ingenuously, that I may have noticed that "there was a lot of touching in this school." It is true that at Mountain Open High school I observed more touching than I had ever seen in a traditional high school, but it did not seem to me to be excessive or particularly noteworthy. But for the students, it manifested a very important characteristic of the school. It seemed productive to ask the informants to tell me more about it. The development of close relationships was enhanced by appropriate touching, hand-shakes, pats on the back, light punches (commonest between males) and hugs. And in the manner of positive feed back, the growth of closer relationships encouraged more touching.

The more senior students identified *Trips* as being a major source of close personal relationships and important friendships. Any trip brings together a small group of people who plan intensely and then live together in close quarters under occasionally trying circumstances. Shallow acquaintance is replaced by intimacy and respect as unexpected weaknesses and resources appear in each person. Furthermore, *Trips*, like most activities, are open to all students regardless of seniority. Several students identified this as a valuable method for "bringing people together."

From experiences like these, students learned new ways of interacting with each other. They came to feel that each one of them had a known place in the sun. This feeling was summarized by Juanita and by Bob. She described difficulty speaking up for her point of view in a group without being dominated by others. Bob, by contrast, experienced difficulty in standing up for his point of view in groups without shouting other people down. The social climate thus tended to moderate the extremes of dominance and submission through a process of building mutual respect and awareness of others.

Students had a lot to say about friendships, cliques and the school social scene. The intense, shared experiences of the program tended to promote individual friendships and friendship groups. Everyone assured me that

the groups did not develop the exclusiveness of cliques, a claim largely supported by my observations. Junior informants did tell about the importance of cliques in their previous schools. By contrast, I was assured, the clique-like codes of dress and behaviour were entirely lacking in Mountain Open High School. Some students specifically cited examples of the openness of friendship groups, as in a group welcoming newcomers to a volleyball game. And there was evidence of some pairing of young men and women, but I was told that this was not a critical part of social acceptance within the school population.

Two other noteworthy features of the students' personal relationships were unique friendships and the experience with peer pressures. Bob and Bill exemplified the former. "Bill and I could never have been best friends in a regular high school," Bob said. And he was seconded by Bill, "Yeah, we'd probably get into fights." Each youth explained to me the social structures which would have encouraged disdain and prevented friendship. These included closed groups with rigorous dress codes and pressures to conform. Other students commented on the lack of peer pressures in Mountain Open except perhaps with respect to conformity with the school rules and for general tolerance. The newer students described their surprise at seeing "people with hair half way down to their butts out there playing basketball" and "people with short hair and Nike shirts out smoking on the smoking porch." Here, the stereotypic code of dress and hair length failed to match behaviour in ways that, combined with the other factors, destroyed the stereotypes.

A few students did describe peer pressure of a kind. Marie was sensitive to a strong peer disapproval of pot-smoking at school, and in fact had some difficulty on that account. Lucille felt a pressure among students to be competetive in selecting extremely exotic passages. She felt that a passage done close to home on a small budget did not get the same kind of recognition as did an expensive passage completed in a distant country. She agreed that this aspect of social pressure was not an intrinsic part of the program, but emerged from students themselves in trying to

outdo each other. Her point was interesting but I was unable to find anyone else who thought that this was a major driving force in the school.

So much sweetness and light led me to expect that the "one big happy family" cliche would appear in the interviews. Those specific words were not used, but the idea was articulated in several other ways. Andy said, "We're a team here." Lucille's words were, "Everybody's really close, not just some people." And Marie assured me that, "Here you feel like you're at home." As I learned more about the backgrounds of the students and of the significant number of them who came from broken families, it seemed to me that their references to family-like relationships expressed the filling of a great need. Later, I will cite a specific exception to the general picture of the school as a happy family and in doing so, hope to strengthen the image overall, for no healthy happy family is without its conflicts and means for resolving them.

Debra summarized the views of several other students about interpersonal relationships by saying, "This is an honest place, probably as honest a place as you'll ever go to." Also in summary, Juanita connected the rich network of personal relationships to the availability of support and help for almost any enterprise. Thus, from the emphasis on personal identity in *Beginnings*, with acceptable forms of personal touching, plus the shared close quarters of *Trips* and a climate of trust and support students grow a wide network of effective relationships with their peers.

Interesting relationships also developed between students and teachers. The students were generally very favourably impressed by their teachers, because of both academic and personal qualities. All of the students commented that the teachers were "knowledgeable." Some informants gave examples of teacher knowledge that impressed them. In one case, a teacher known for prowess in higher mathematics gave a course on the Vietnam war in cooperation with a social studies teacher. In other cases, similar crossing of subject boundaries or the development of innovative courses to match particular student interests were cited as examples of

admirable teacher competence. A number of students were also sensitive to the paradox that, in their eyes, a teacher's knowledge was sometimes displayed in comfortable admissions of ignorance. "They know that they have the skill and that they don't know everything; and they like learning," was the way Bill put it. The younger students were impressed that the teachers were willing to learn new things, to try new tasks, to display the same joy in learning expected of the students. They interpreted this quality of the teachers as a highly valued sign of strength and confidence.

The teachers' behaviours towards students also drew comments. "They always have time for you," was the way Bill put it. Adjectives like caring, good-humoured, kind, tolerant and understanding were used in the other accounts of what the teachers were like. The students were convinced that the teachers enjoyed their work, that they liked being at the school. This was in sharp contrast to previous experience for some, where "teachers didn't seem to like their jobs and they certainly didn't like you." Mountain Open teachers were seen to treat students "like people" or, with more insight, "like themselves." In short, students seemed to feel that they were being treated like adults by teachers.

As students talked of teachers, it was natural that I should start to hear about discipline problems. These were usually attributed to the students' past experiences and I had some difficulty in uncovering what a "discipline problem" would look like in the school. The reason for the difficulty was not reticence but an almost total lack of breaches of discipline in the sense usually understood in schools. The absence of a large number of rules and regulations was identified by students as helping to keep teachers from being enforcers of school law and order. Other factors, such as the regular meetings with advisors, the airing of contentious issues in Governance, the universally acknowledged access to teachers, and the quick establishment of support groups all combined to eliminate the growth of acute discipline problems.

Here is an example of how these factors worked in a potentially fractious issue to establish and maintain the positive relationships that students claimed to have with their teachers.

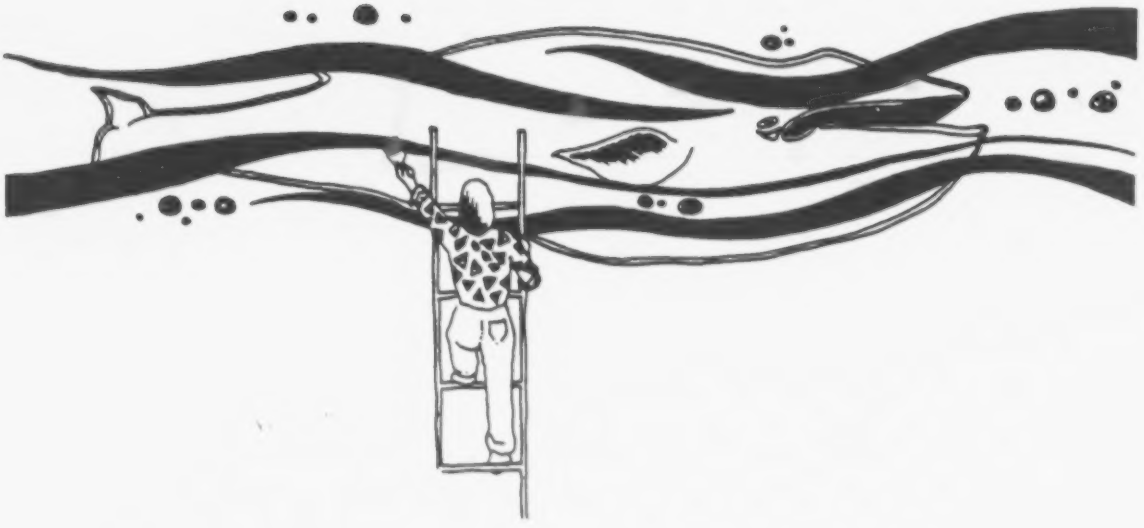

**Figure 6. The Whale Mural Is Repaired.**

One wall of the gymnasium was panelled and on it students had painted with pride a huge whale mural. During a play interval the wall was damaged, with evidence that a possibly accidental event could have been deliberately exaggerated by persons unknown. I was interested, in the context of staff-student relationships, to hear the discussion of the situ-

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ation in Governance. It was initiated by the principal who put the damage done to the mural as a community problem. A number of students spoke, some expressing dismay and disgust at the damage, others arguing reasonably that a gymnasium wall is scarcely the place for a valued work of art. The dialogue was lively, warm but never recriminatory, and there was no apparent resolution that I could see at the time. Some weeks later however, I noticed that repairs were being undertaken, by students I surmised. The scene, so typical of any secondary school was marked by reasonableness, adult treatment and a lack of any kind of personal assault. It is little wonder that in the eyes of the students this matter did not count as a discipline problem.

New students arrived into an established ambience of rich positive relationships among all the members of the school community. Their interviews were full of what they had discovered in contrast to the social scenes in the schools they had left. New students were not able to understand the causes of the difference. The older students had had similar entry experiences but now were able to see that good relationships were the results of particular values and modes of action.

An action that particularly impressed students and influenced their relationships with the teachers was the presence of students on the hiring committees. As previously indicated, students were pleased to have the responsibility and were committed to their choices. The teachers were also bound to students by the experience. One teacher gave me a vivid description of the interview process and of her trepidation as the adult members left her to face the students' uninhibited questions alone. The students who had served on hiring committees told me that one of the things they looked for was whether the teacher had a need to control and dominate others. The interview technique reported to me posed hypothetical situations for the candidate's reaction. Students also looked for the ability of the teacher to "be a good listener" and interestingly, this quality was identified by students not on hiring committees as being characteristic of the teachers.

Students had rather less to say about their relationships with people outside of the school. But a few patterns emerged from the interviews. The students seemed to see outside agencies as units with which one negotiated in order to achieve some end. This general perception applied equally to arranging visits to a nursing home, organizing a soccer game with students from another school, or getting a block of tickets for a rock concert. In this respect students practiced one of the skills required in the *Pre-Walkabout* phase, namely, being to able to deal successfully with bureaucracies.

A few students told me about specific relationships with individuals other than parents. Bill had a part-time job and contrasted his relationship with his boss with his relationship with his teachers. It was interesting, in the light of Gibbons' intentions, that Bill perceived school as a form of work, and that, despite the responsible nature of his paid employment, he felt much more trusted and motivated in the school setting. Another student told me about her companion and roommate and the way in which they had to sort out an equitable division of costs, labor and responsibilities. In both these instances, the thrust of the curriculum in terms of getting along with people was directly related to the students' lives outside of school.

Most of the students referred indirectly to their parent or parents. In some cases, the students were at the school with full parental support and encouragement. These students described mostly happy and stable relationships at home. They cited instances of communication between their parents and the school staff and they viewed these exchanges as beneficial. Other students described their parents in more adversarial terms, largely because of parental reluctance to have their child attend an alternative school. These students thought parents had grave misgivings about the ability of their offspring to profit from the program. The students felt that their chief task with their parents was to convince them that registration at Mountain Open High School was a wise move.

The students in this position found the task difficult because the program did not meet meet conventional expectations involving traditional subjects and norm-referenced grades. And the special vocabulary of the Walkabout program made communications at home more difficult. All the same, the students in this kind of situation revealed both determination to stick with their choice of schools and also an attractive earnestness in their desire to satisfy and please their parents. Parental approval was very important to every student I interviewed.

*AN EXPERIENTIAL PROGRAM*

Many aspects of Mountain Open High School were obviously experiential. But the students had difficulty in going beyond the obvious to describe more subtle experiential elements in their work. Nevertheless, there was a distinct awareness of the value of learning from direct experience in the interviews. This section describes the students' accounts of experiential learning.

The students agreed that Mountain Open High School offered more than other schools. This perception was in striking contrast to the smallness of the school and the apparently limited ability of the staff to mount a large diversity of courses and workshops. But the students did not see the school's offerings as being limited to the intramural curriculum. Debra told me, "Anything is possible here. I can go to Australia, I can learn to fly a plane. I can do virtually anything I want provided I put the effort into it." Marie put it that the school "gives you opportunities to explore," and Andy, more picturesquely, said "It's a perfect place to live out your fantasies in education. You find out what you want to do and go out there and do it." Andy went on, realistically, to list the preliminary skills that a person would need for such direct action. And in doing that he put the so-called "basics" of communication, and calculation, together with an ability to get along with people.

In a similar vein, Lucille, despite her decision to transfer into a normal high school, said, "There are things offered here you would never get in a regular high school. We have so much more than a regular school." She went on to give specific detail of how much she had learned on a trip to a western Canadian city. And Pat, too, stressed the importance of *Trips* as a source of learning. Pat talked about the prime place of experience within the school. He explained how his interest in applied Biology and summer work on a forest survey crew yielded extramural experience which could be parlayed into a passage, provided the plan met his passage committee's approval. He saw that as distinctly possible. By contrast, Pat also described the dynamic experiential approach taken in his advanced mathematics course which put him ahead of friends in college both in substance and in enthusiasm.

It fell to the younger students, Bill, Bob and Marie to articulate directly the centrality of experierience in the school's teaching methods. Bill explained to me, rather patiently, "They teach in a different fashion here than they do in other schools." In the course of probing what he meant, Bob gave an example contrasting the International Dance class, previously described, with exposure to comparable content in his previous school. "What I really like is the way the classes are run. Like the dance class. You know we don't sit there, like you do in a traditional class. I suppose a PE class would be the closest you'd come to it. Sitting there in neat little rows watching a movie of where they (the dances) originate and never getting to dance." Then he added a point which illustrates to perfection Gibbons' idea that learning through experience should happen in productive loops. "We are doing it. And we've performed at the Elk's Club for a senior citizens' party. You know, we're making a contribution." Bob's example enabled Bill to generalize, "Experience is the most important thing here. Everyone has to learn by experience or it's not learned." And in this he was echoed quite independently by Marie, who added examples of direct experience from her biology classes.

Finally, these three students described the critical part played by the processes of writing journals and self-evaluations. They expressed as a personal discovery the value of deliberately reflecting on an experience after the event. "Evaluations force you to connect it up, to make it relevant," was the way Bob put it.

Students and teachers gave some clues in interviews about experience-based methods in the classrooms of Mountain Open High School. But the picture was incomplete without first-hand observation. Consequently I sat in on a number of classes in traditional subjects, advanced mathematics (following Pat's lead), biology (to see what Marie had been telling me about), and chemistry because of it's unique timetable, meeting one full day each week. The students were right. The teaching was "in a different fashion." In all cases, even complex abstractions, were experienced by the students prior to discussion. The students themselves seemed unaware of it, but there was also a marked lack of dependence upon a single book acting as a text. There were many books in use, but none of them centrally defined the scope or sequence of the subject matter. Those limits arose from the students' reactions to the experiences orchestrated by the teacher. The courses in academic subjects were organized to provide problems for the students to solve. Here I am referring to something different than the numerical exercises for practice at the end of the chapter in a textbook, although there were lots of practice questions in both the math and the chemistry classes. The experiential approach seemed to include the rotation of any section of content into a practical, problematic framework for which students were expected to find solutions. The existence of multiple solutions was recognized, not only as a theoretical possibility but in practice as well.

*TROUBLES IN THE SCHOOL*

It was difficult to uncover weaknesses and flaws in the program. In the first place the students were frankly out to impress me. The new students were full of enthusiasm for the school. The more experienced students

had an investment in their education which they wanted to cover. Three of them, early in their interviews told me that they wanted to make a good impression and gave a variety of reasons usually based on favourite program components or on an ideological position of agreement with the school's fundamental assumptions. Secondly, the students, in congruence with school aims, saw weaknesses and flaws as problems to be solved. They had a positive disposition toward any event or arrangement which was not satisfactory and they had well-used mechanisms for seeking redress, making adjustments, or launching appeals. Thus they found it difficult to adopt a negative critical point of view.

All the same, some criticisms did surface. The bulk of the information in this section comes from students, seconded and confirmed by teachers' accounts and by direct observation. The critical abilities of the teacher informants were especially helpful in compensating for the rosy view of students.

There were a steady stream of personal troubles, difficulties and shortcomings. It almost seemed, at times, as if these were the chief topics of transaction in the school. I suggested to a teacher that the school acted like a lightning rod to attract and discharge all kinds of problems in addition to the usual academic ones, and while the metaphor did not appeal to her, she agreed that the advisory system and the weekly staff meeting did tend to bring many concerns to the surface. My point is that the program worked to reveal rather than conceal all kinds of social and motivational problems of the students. And it did more than that. Having exposed the difficulties, the school provided mechanisms for resolving them. Where the issue is strictly personal, individual advising and support groups were available. Where the issue was communal, the advising groups and Governance provide forums for resolution. The use of these mechanisms gave students a feeling that the school was a dynamic place, always changing to correct itself. Both teachers and students were convinced that they had a strong voice in decisions. Thus both groups expressed a strong sense of pride and ownership in the program.

Juanita was the student most sensitive to social structures. She identified latent competitiveness and male dominance in the school as flaws. In doing so she was drew on her interest in the status of women and on her own struggles to be assertive and to have a place in the sun. She supported her general claims with specific examples ranging from the use of pick-up soccer games by dominant males to make others "look and feel small," to the attempts by individual students to manipulate planning groups and committees without hearing everyone's voice. Similarly, Juanita found that there was an unspoken competition in the selection of passages. She felt that it was becoming more important to plan a passage to be impressive rather than to meet one's developmental needs. I was not able to confirm the degree of support for her perception. In pointing to these kinds of problems she confined criticism to a few students only and to herself for the weakness she perceived in her ability to provide balance. But the point was taken. Potential for abuse of those kinds was intrinsic in the program, especially if the students who would like to resist them felt unable to do so.

Out of Juanita's remarks another problem surfaced. Part of the student body had prior experience in an alternative school. Tanglewood Junior High School was a major feeder school for Mountain Open. Students from Tanglewood had certain advantages over their classmates from other schools in the county. They had had a good sense of the structure of Walkabout on entry. They were accustomed to dealing with the dilemmas of freedom with responsibility and they tended to feel a certain status upon entry into the high school. This, I suspected was naturally enhanced by the conviction among teachers that Tanglewood students were better prepared than others for the program. The differences in readiness amongst students tended to be reduced by the shared experiences of *Beginnings* and *Learning to Learn*, but all the same, Juanita showed me a residual disadvantage of the Tanglewood connection.

A second flaw in the program appeared in the excessive number of simultaneous events competing for the attention of students and staff.

Sometimes the schedule for any day could be regarded as an exercise in distraction. Students did not specifically mention this as a flaw; they were engrossed in their options. But a number did complain that they had to miss something because of the pressing need to be elsewhere at the same time. Students described the great difficulty they experienced in completing work, especially evaluations, and a perceptive teacher attributed this difficulty in part to the large number of inviting activities luring the students away from the full closure of earlier work. The teacher put it this way: "If students have the freedom to make choices, to come and go, then sometimes it's hard to hang on to them, to reach a point where there's real achievement, or excellence, or even completion. I think completion is very difficult for students here."

This characteristic of the program was one that could be adjusted within the broad outline of the Walkabout curriculum. And two lines of adjustment were under active consideration late in my visits. Some students were keen on the possibility of having the school admit students a year earlier, thus providing four years rather than three for the total program. They argued that such a move would ease congestion among the various offerings. A committee was studying that possibility at the time. Another less radical adjustment was to exercise somewhat more discipline when scheduling events, classes, workshops and trips. The somewhat leaner schedule during my last visit to the school indicated that the change had been started.

The trouble of excess loading into the schedule seemed to be a reasonable consequence of the many and diverse opportunities the program offered. I was therefore surprised when one of the teachers suggested that, despite the wide-ranging talents and willingness of the staff, there were important deficiencies in the subject matter available. For example, there was no expert instruction in modern languages and no in-house access to industrial arts or other shop instruction. It was true, as many students told me, that some languages could be learned at a practical level appropriate for a traveller. And similarly, school subjects could be stud-

ied by registration in any other school in the county. However, in practice, the awkwardness of travel and the mismatch of schedules made it very difficult for students to actually use the options.

A related problem identified by another teacher was the tendency for classes to be offered in a rather piece-meal, patchwork fashion resulting in a lack of continuity for subjects requiring a long sequence of instruction and practice. Again, students seemed not to feel a lack in this respect.

Both of these issues touched on the question of the size of the school population. It was generally recognized by my informants that the smallness of the school was a very important factor in making it work well. To have additional disciplines represented on the staff would necessitate increasing the size of the community and thus introduce, in the minds of many, a greater evil.

*CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS*

I was struck, in every student interview, by statements that could only be construed as philosophies of education. All of the students commented on the processes of education they were experiencing. The students seemed to be aware of what the program stood for, how it worked and what they thought of it. In one case, in describing an incident, a student related the behaviours of the people involved to Kohlberg's model of moral development. Students often described events in terms of school goals, and several students specifically and sympathetically described difficulties experienced by teachers when students were faltering in motivation. Older students were sensitive to the strains that a new intake imposed on the teachers. A couple of students had especial interest in alternative education and tried to use the interview as an opportunity to ask me for my views. Awareness of educational processes also was revealed in the universal agreement on the important role played by *Trips* in breaking down barriers of all kinds.

Finally, I was intrigued by the response of students and teachers to my questions about failure. The students found the idea almost incomprehensible. Failure was not a special status conferred on a particular individual, class or group. Rather it was a universal experience which one was expected to examine, think about and learn from. The school was not seen as a place that failed people. As Juanita put it, "A person does not fail the school, they fail themselves." The normal route for students unable or unwilling to work within the program was to drop-out of school altogether, or to transfer to another school within the jurisdiction. In the students' eyes, these were sensible decisions taken after much thought, effort and soul-searching and could not be regarded as failure. Thus failure, like other short-comings, was set into a positive context.

Teachers, who better understood the point of my questions, were more specific.

> I don't think any kid in this school can go straight through, safe and secure. I think they get pushed enough that that won't happen. It's interesting to watch a student who is used to being a total success. Because, of course, the tactics by which you become a total success wherever you were before are not the same here. The very best academic students are very threatened in this school; the rules have changed. And our passages require that you have taken the successes and the failures that have come with the process and have learned and grown from them.

And in a similar way, another teacher summed it up:

> We expect a fairly high level of ability to make commitments, to organize time and materials and to follow through with things. To be responsible and accountable. I think we have high expectations about those things but we're frequently disappointed. But for students that make it, that get through and manage to complete the Walkabout program and graduate, I am just amazed at what wonderful people they are, and at how skilled and mature they are.

CHAPTER SIX

# WALKABOUT IN ACTION

This chapter describes a trip and two passages. The information about the passages came from reports by the students to the community in a Governance meeting. The information for the trip description came from students journals, evaluations and other documents. Unlike the other data, trip information came from the 1986-87 school year.

*PASSAGES*

The library was crowded for the Governance meeting. The student chairperson announced that two students had returned from passages out of state and the first item of business was to have them tell about their experiences. The first student came forward, perched casually against a table, and conversationally began her story.

Her recent time away from the school had been part of a combined adventure and careers exploration passage. She had gone to Chicago first, to investigate the possibility of working and training as a dancer. Chicago was a disappointment because there had not been many opportunities available for her to work or study. She then moved on to New York and there found everything that an aspiring young dancer could desire.

Making her way into the dance scene was difficult. She first had to overcome her "Denver sense of inferiority" and then face the realization that her dancing potential might be short of requirements. At length, after several false leads and ineffective starts she was registered in a world famous dance studio. At this stage she fully realized the pain and physical labour of professional dancing. It was hard, she said, really hard. And the difficulty increased as early promise and optimism gave way to the knowledge that this was not to be her path.

Her stay in New York was filled with other difficulties. It was difficult to find a room and more difficult still to adjust to the rhythms and lifestyle of a roommate. People spoke differently and moved at a different pace. She had to learn new patterns of courtesy of which the most painful was to stop saying "thank you." Finding a pleasant place to do laundry was a problem and most difficult of all was managing her limited funds. "I was so scared of running out of money, and everything was so expensive, that I really over budgetted", she said.

Throughout this casual and rambling account, the assembled students, staff and guests listened intently. There was a round of warm applause as she shrugged and said "I guess that's all. It was a really great experience and I learned so much."

The chair immediately called on the second person, another career exploration passage this time worked in communities in southern Texas. This student came to the front table but spoke more formally. She had always been interested in sales and several family members were in business. It made sense to her to look into an advertisement she had seen for sales persons in the publishing industry. The job turned out to be selling books and magazines door-to-door in an area that was totally new to her. Against her parent's preferences, she took the job and reported to the Texas headquarters of the company for training.

After learning the ropes and the merchandise, she was on her own to trudge the residential streets, knocking on doors, seeking to sell from the stock on hand and to obtain orders. The training had inspired her and natural optimism swept her into the work.

It was at this stage that the tough lessons began. In some neighborhoods, people commented on her accent to the point that she found it necessary to adapt the local drawl. "You have to blend in," she said. In other neighborhoods she felt very much the anglo interloper in black or hispanic communities. "It's really weird to feel and be a minority of one."

Sales were slow. She was on an emotional roller coaster, swelling optimism approaching a door ... "maybe I'll sell here"... followed by the swift downslope of discouragement as the door slammed with a loud "no." There were some successes, just enough to promise that next day or next week things would be better. But she found that the successes were tainted with guilt. Sales could be good where there was a weak, indecisive customer. The hard sell was truly effective. In such cases, she had to wonder whether the people really wanted the items and could really afford them. Her conscience was being battered by yet another problem. Her parents had disapproved this enterprise, but supported it in the end. On the weekly long distance call home, she felt obliged to be cheerful and positive even though the sales were not going well and she would have preferred to receive some parental sympathy.

Her determination to stick with her contract, to see the business through, carried her forward to a full conclusion. She completed the undertaking and learned that sales, at least in that context was not for her. She said that she had learned much about ethnic relationships at a street level, had learned to adapt to her social environment; and she had learned to marshall the toughness to persevere independently. She was sixteen.

Again there was warm applause and as it faded, the Chair invited questions. Several students asked for points of detailed information. How did you find a place to stay? Where did you eat? How much time off was there? Staff questions tended to be more general. What were the most important things you learned? Where do you go from here? All the questions were answered directly and simply, or were deferred in some cases. "I'll talk to you later, okay?"

*TRIPS*

In the bitter greyness before dawn in Mid-November, four high school students and their teacher loaded gear into a van and headed eastward to Denver. There, they joined five others, and repacked the goods needed

for a 12-day trip. The sub-zero temperature made loading on the van roof especially uncomfortable. The depressing hour and the crippling cold were offset by the exciting prospect ahead and by the encouraging sight of their principal and another teacher there to see them off.

This grim beginning was the culmination of six weeks of planning for a Work Trip, this time to the Junior Museum in Tallahassee, Florida. The party comprised seven Mountain Open students, one student teacher and one teacher. The special objective was to build an enclosure and viewing facility to house red wolves, an endangered species being reintroduced in Florida. In addition the students would explore at first hand new terrain, new ways and new peoples. They would also swim with manatees and struggle with the problems of a nomadic existence in confined quarters. The planning required the students to work out routes, probable accommodation (camping), stops and menus. It was necessary to research the museum animals, particularly the red wolf, and to gain some construction skills with basic hand tools. Actual practice in building a picket fence provided additional funds for the trip. Snorkelling instruction was provided for the manatee adventure.

The journey itself began according to plan. The van soon became home with individuals snoozing, chatting, playing the radio, and in one case, sitting rigidly and uncomfortably in the front seat between teacher and the student teacher. The most impressive change for the travellers was climatic. Cool humid air was pleasant after the hard cold of the morning. By evening they were camped under the stars in a camp ground in Oklahoma.

**Figure 7. It was cold and dark when the van was loaded.**

On the second day, the scenery began to change enough to show fall colours, strikingly red to western eyes, and new scenes as diverse as magnolia trees and nuclear power plants. That evening it was much harder to find a camp. At a gas stop the group had an encounter with a local character whose accent was almost incomprehensible and who insisted that he would be glad to have them camp in his yard. Students admired and laughed at the teacher's effective but hasty disentanglement from the man's persistence. The social climate within the van had changed to the extent that the front seat student had moved to the back and was heard singing to the radio. The search for a campsite was pursued vainly until it was decided to travel all night. Stretch breaks became ever more desirable and sleep was fitful at best.

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At length, and after other adventures, like the loss of a chunk of tire tread, they reached their destination at 5 a.m. Rather than disturb anyone, the group bedded down in the parking lot beside the van. A student's journal records the arrival.

> Mike, a kind of heavy set man in overalls, who had a bushy red beard, flat straight hair and a smooth southern accent (at least that's what I could make out in the dark) squatted down by the fence and said, 'Y'all want to come inside?' At that point I was too tired to be frustrated, so I picked up my bag, pad and pillow, and placed myself in the van, once again.
>
> We were led to the bird room which was hot, humid and noisy, but no matter, I quickly laid down and slept soundly until morning.

The next few days were taken up with relaxed exploration of the new environment and with starting the work project. The museum staff were surprised by the group's readiness to work and time was needed to gather the construction materials. The students helped with that and learned some basics of habitat management for animals. The turtle habitat was a special source of fascination. There was time to observe strange architecture ("all the houses have porches") and try new foods like boiled peanuts and coon snacks on the roadside, or steamed okra at a local diner. There was also time to escape the close confines of the group and enjoy being alone. A student journal records such an interval.

> I'm sitting here quietly in the white-tailed deer habitat. Underneath the elevated platform I stand on I look straight down on the bull deer. He eats his yellow grain set out by his keepers. He looks up to me with an innocent and curious look in his eye, which cannot be fully described in words. He tilts his head back down to the ground and continues eating.
>
> Not far away I hear a squirrel calling. It is a brown squirrel making a high pitched sort of sound which reminds me of a squeaky gate opening and closing. It starts in a low pitch and raises into a high.
>
> There is a red-tailed hawk which flew down quietly and sat on a tree. He watches me. Silently. Once in a while he will fluff up his feathers. Itch under his wing. But he is always watching. He

> watches everything, notices everything. 'The Eye of a Hawk.' He sits for a long time. Soon he squawks a little, as to say 'goodbye,' then flies away. I watch him soar through the trees. So gracefully, so powerfully, so wonderfully.
>
> I can hear splashes in the water within the habitat. I wonder if it was another turtle that climbed up a cypress tree and then fell into the water.
>
> Meanwhile the hot sun bears down on my back as I sweat in uncomfortness. A wasp swarms around me and my coke can annoyingly.
>
> There was one moment when everything was happening all at once. It was a beautiful moment.

There were two major highlights of the days at the museum. One was the actual construction of the red wolf habitat. The other was the sharing of culture between students and hosts. The construction began with some site preparation. Trees and shrubs were cleared to make it possible for a trenching machine to dig the four foot ditch in which the fence was to be buried. The pace of the work increased as students acclimated and materials were obtained. By the third day fencing was in full progress and everyone was skilled at digging post holes, setting posts, setting, weaving and stretching fence. It was agreed to concentrate hard on the work through the weekend and then spend a relaxing few days at Crystal River. That was how it was done.

The sharing of culture happened mostly in the evenings. It was a matter of intense fascination for the students to be entertained in the Florida homes of their adult hosts, and to be treated as peers and guests. Students were captivated by the lifestyles of these people and by their willingness to share it with strangers from far away. There were ghost stories in a haunted house, homey visits on the porch with harmonica tunes, warm southern breezes, stories, jokes and more new foods, like collard greens, corn bread, chicken necks and rice. Preparing the greens was eye-opening for one student:

> Mike asked us if we ate collard greens in Colorado. Of course we told him we don't. So he said he would fix us a southern meal were we 'willin' to try 'em'. So that afternoon, I washed collard greens. Mike said, 'Gee, if I knew it would take y'all this long to wash them greens we would have put them in the dishwasher.' We all thought he was kidding until tonight when his girl friend told us how good it worked.

The architecture and contents of their hosts houses were impressive. The students explored every nook and cranny and speculated on the marvels of a loft construction bedroom which overlooked the living quarters below and was equipped with a swinging chair. Details like cupboards without doors, thus forcing the neat and attractive placement of stores were items of enchanted interest. There was also a dance which even the shyest student came to enjoy and a surprise birthday celebration for a student which was recorded like this.

> I was so surprised I was more than surprised. At first I couldn't believe that all of these people who didn't even know me that well, would plan all of this. I felt that everyone was so sincere, I knew that I was liked. It was just what I needed. I really appreciated it that morning when a few folks called me aside to pat me on the back.

One student recorded those impressions in a list of words, almost cinematic in quality.

> Claude's house ....
> the hammock
> kaleidoscopes
> concertina, squeeze-box
> the porch swing
> Claude's friend from Wiscon.
>
> Baked potato
> funny orange juice
> salad
> a garden hose ending above the sink
> plastic windows
> No locks
> Music ... Taj Mahal

Claude's grandfather (?)
was a circus clown, knew
the first and most famous
of all circus clowns, picture
above the sink

Washing dishes ... drying them
in the window sill.

Pie in the oven
We head down to the sauna.
Relaxing overpowering heat
the river
sitting on the upper platform with Bruce
soaked from head to toe
Off into the woods to get dressed

Walk back in the bright
moonlight
A blind possum ... I didn't see it
Half the pie ... gone!
Daniel (?)
Drive home
it's late
but
fun

The construction work on the red wolf habitat had reached the planned stage of near-completion so the group left the Junior Museum at Tallahasee for the Crystal River and some play days. They had the campgrounds pretty much to themselves and continued to discover the unexpected aspects of the environment. There were frogs in the washrooms. Sharp sticky burrs in the grass and clouds of mosquitoes. The unaccustomed humidity kept clothing and towels in a state of perpetual dampness. All were novel and stimulating events. The group explored the life along the beach and had their first experiences with tidewater. Then there was the promised exploration of Crystal River and play with the manatees. Students frolicked, astonished, in the clear water, the weeds, stroking and playing with the unusual animals.

In two days it was time to return to the Museum to complete the final stages of the work and participate in the grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony. Here, for the first time the students came to see the value of their gift of service in terms of what others would gain quite beyond what they themselves had gained. Here too, there loomed up the first major item of unhappiness. Another group had come to the museum at the same time to construct the decking on part of the observation ramp which the Mountain Open students had planned and for which they had prepared the foundation. It was difficult to let go the idea that the habitat was "theirs" and to accept that other people would, in turn, make a contribution. This event was the occasion for a long and thorough discussion about the nature of learning through service.

The return journey home included an exciting stop to explore New Orleans while billeting in a Church Hall. Here, some of the students "got a little lost" and returned to the billets much later than expected. This was cause for some anxiety and the source of further frank discussion. The nomads moved on, stopping one last time in Dallas at the home of their teacher's mother. There was a warm family-like welcome enjoyed by all and a chance for showers and long evaluative discussions about the trip and the learning which happened on it. At length there was one final long overnight drive and the travellers returned safely, but changed, to the school. A student's journal described the arrival this way.

> We got into Evergreen at about noon. The van was emptied and most of the group equipment was put away. Meeting those at school was different. It was kind of like I walked into another world. I didn't really like it and I was glad to leave early. I find that telling folks here about everything that happened there is hard. They can never fully comprehend or understand all that is felt and all that is experienced. It is a bit frustrating to want to share everything and only succeed in surfacing it all. The memories and knowledge I gained from this trip I will always carry with me and I will never forget.

CHAPTER SEVEN

# WALKABOUT IN PERSPECTIVE

This chapter connects the picture of Mountain Open High School to the conceptual framework through which the observations were made. First, the real-life school is compared with the school that Gibbons imagined. The comparison tests the congruence of the prescription (the espoused theory-of-action) with the actual practice (the inferred theories-in-use). Then, I will consider the patterns of behaviour and interaction revealed at the school in terms of the two models described by Argyris and Schön.

In general there is a high degree of congruence between the writings of Gibbons and school practice. The prevailing themes are those of challenge and the ability to function effectively in the adult world. Students were able to express school goals in terms of joy in learning and in terms of their personal effectiveness in the world as it is. Students also expressed their responsibility to work for the world as it ought to be. Students responded to the program as to a challenge and and held exalted ideas about their possible futures.

The school was fundamentally experiential. Direct experience was the raw material for all learning and even the most abstract and academic matter was set in the context of the students' experiences. As Gibbons prescribed, experience was built into sequences of instruction which included study, productivity and evaluation, with the student centrally involved and responsible at each stage. Similarly, Gibbons saw out-of-school experiences as legitimate parts of the learning process. The account of Mary, the student hitch-hiker, exemplifies these ideas in action.

Mountain Open High School was efficient in using the operation of the school to provide challenging experiences for the students. Independence and responsibility were coupled in all aspects of school life. The students were responsible for their progress through the program, and in this way,

individual decision-making was required. The students were also responsible for many aspects of school operation, (lunches are an example) and here their decision-making was more cooperative. In the context of classes and courses, the range of offerings and the decisions of students to select from among them continued the themes of challenge and independence. This control of courses covers the spectrum pictured by Gibbons: In some *Passages*, each student designed the learning; in others, the work was cooperatively planned with one or two comrades; and in academic courses, the students submitted to and functioned within a plan of work designed by someone else.

A comparable arrangement prevailed in the school's social life. The students had to be able to do some things entirely on their own, like writing evaluations. Yet there was a social climate which encouraged friendships in cooperative groups that seemed not to develop into the exclusiveness of cliques. Students recognized their connection with larger groups, like an advisee group, or the school as a whole, and did not allow friendships to unduly influence the independence of their decisions.

Independent decision-making was most pointedly demanded in the writing of evaluations and the transcript. Here, as Gibbons required, was a challenge at a high level of maturity. The student had to reflect on the cycle of experience, study and production to find valuable learning. At the end, approaching graduation, the student was obliged to synthesize the whole into a comprehensive, presentable, public record of competence and accomplishment.

The staff provided for the major problems that Gibbons predicted would accompany the imposition of such a challenging degree of independence and responsibility. The centrality of the advisor to the student's program was the first and most important line of support in promoting the growth of intrinsic motivation. The careful, thorough and dramatic introduction of new students to the program in *Beginnings* and *Learning to Learn* created the appropriate set of expectations and encouraged students to

move as effectively as they were able into the *Pre-Walkabout* program. Here too, the school was congruent with Gibbons' ideas, for the overall program had a preparatory component which recognized and remedied the younger students' lack of readiness for the demands of the *Passages*.

Gibbons also predicted that a program based on Walkabout would have to control the risks students undertook and allocate resources in ways different from normal schools. The students would have to be aware of dangers in the program, psychological and physical. The perception that these were controlled came from first, the frequent meetings with advisors, and second, from the monitoring role of the passage committees. The school's resources were precisely the same, in monetary terms, as those for other secondary schools in the county. But they were deployed very differently. The presence of many community teachers and the willingness of staff other than teachers to work with students, plus other factors, decreased the pupil-teacher ratio in most classes to one-half or one-third of the norm for regular schools. Similarly, the diversion of intercollegiate athletic funds supported the trips, and at the same time encouraged much less expensive and much more inclusive sports.

Gibbons proposed that students should be involved in the organization of the program and in its day-to-day operation. This is fundamentally a requirement that students share in the power structure of the school. It was clear that people in the school were willing to share real power. One example was the refusal of the principal to usurp the power of Governance to decide whether or not to allow me to interview students and attend classes. Another example was the ability of Governance to debate and decide program matters like the arrangement of pre-walkabout skills. This pattern was typical of power-sharing throughout the school. The teachers claimed to like this school better than their previous schools because they had a say in policies and events. They felt that they had some power. Students also felt that they had some power, because, as they pointed out and as I saw for myself, the program was continually being fine-tuned through the mechanism of Governance.

Similarly, the representation of students on all administrative committees, like a hiring committee, convinced them that they contributed to the shape of life at the school.

There are two of Gibbons's specifications that I was not able to verify directly in the school. It is not clear to what extent the school actually fostered life-long learning. It could be argued on the basis of this account that such an attitude *should* be present in graduates. The senior students and the one or two graduates I met claimed it. But only a longitudinal study some substantial time in the future could tell. The other specification is that of concluding each student's secondary education with a personally significant ceremony which openly displays their accomplishments and demonstrates competence and maturity. The graduation ceremony was to bring the community, the graduate and the family together in a celebration of achievement and welcome to the emerged adult. I was unable to attend a graduation ceremony and had to rely on reports and descriptions that indicated an event having these attributes.

It is important at this stage to exemplify the rich network of interlocking, multiple functions in any activity which enables a school such as this to achieve a high degree of congruence between its espoused theories and its theories-in-use. A large number of students and teachers identified *Trips* as a key program component in achieving many school goals. Let us see how a trip reveals Gibbons's dream in action.

The planning of a trip requires cooperation by all participants. It also calls for study and learning related to the trip's mission and this could include geography, language, natural history and law content. The availability of transportation reveals the special use of budget as well as the versatility of the teachers to act as properly licenced drivers. Personal costs must be born by individuals and thus fund-raising becomes a relevant activity. Now, the trip has a clearly defined set of programmatic purposes related to the destination, the route and the planning, and there is also a set of social gains. The travellers spend long intervals confined

to the close quarters of the van where personal interactions and irritations have maximum opportunity to surface. The people come from all sections of the school population and are thrown into a novel degree of intimacy. Thus the trip combines learning in personal, social and academic domains. Furthermore the social impact of a trip persists within the school afterwards because the students have discovered deep relationships with people outside their previous friendship groups and across age and seniority lines. A trip is a major motivator for some students. Trips also reveal the teachers to the students in a new light. The responsibility for planning is shared by teachers and students and thus a trip is a microcosm of the power sharing within the school at large. Finally a trip proves the claim of the school to interact with and attend to the real world beyond its walls. As such, it shows how radically Gibbons's ideas in action depart from conventional secondary school practice.

The work of Argyris and Schön provides a useful framework for understanding many aspects of Mountain Open High School. That framework will be described now.

Argyris and Schön have reported that professionals tend to act under a set of assumptions which leads to congruence between the overt espoused theories and the covert theories-in-use. First, they argue, it is assumed that in all events there are winners and losers. Second, rational (i.e. objective, intellectual and unemotional) behaviour is most effective. Third, that public checking of assumptions is intolerably risky. And fourth, Argyris and Schön contend that other people behave according to these assumptions. These assumptions lead to model I behaviour which is governed by the need to rigorously pursue goals, maximize winning, supress personal conflict and maintain rationality. These needs, called governing variables, are controlled by an extensive repertoire of tactics which include professional control and ownership of the work, defensiveness in exchanges between people, withholding information to "help" others and by private decision-making.

Consequently, in Model I behaviour, persons confirm their assumptions and find support for the characteristics they attribute to others. Argyris and Schön call this the "self-sealing" of one's hunches. Model I is perfected by single-loop learning, in which the professional worker or organization develops new techniques to maintain the existing situation. Model I has the great disadvantage of gradually removing professional practice from the world it purports to serve. And the drift is supported and enhanced by the model itself, for the actors are trapped by their theories-in-use into self sealing behaviour. They are prevented from openly checking assumptions, hunches and attributions and thus never get to reset or adjust their governing variables through double-loop learning. Only some sort of major up-heaval can break the vicious circle inherent in Model I.

By contrast, Argyris and Schön have described and tested a different pattern of action which they call Model II. The assumptions of professionals who act under Model II are: first, action should be based on valid information; second, people are able to make effective choices and decisions; third, people behave most effectively according to their internal commitments. From these assumptions come governing variables characterized by the need to generate valid information, maintain freedom of choice and establish internal commitment to the enterprise. Some typical behaviour patterns of professional practice in Model II include: establishing risky situations where clients and colleagues confirm or modify information about themselves; jointly controlling and owning tasks; enhancing open confrontation on difficult issues; and offering options and choices. The willingness of Model II practitioners to attend to negative feed-back means that the theories held by practitioners can be disconfirmed through public testing. Model II behaviour results in double-loop learning. That is, theories are adjusted and new methods or techniques are found to enhance practice. A professional system operating on Model II is characterized by a positive quality of life, high authenticity, large freedom of choice, and great effectiveness in solving

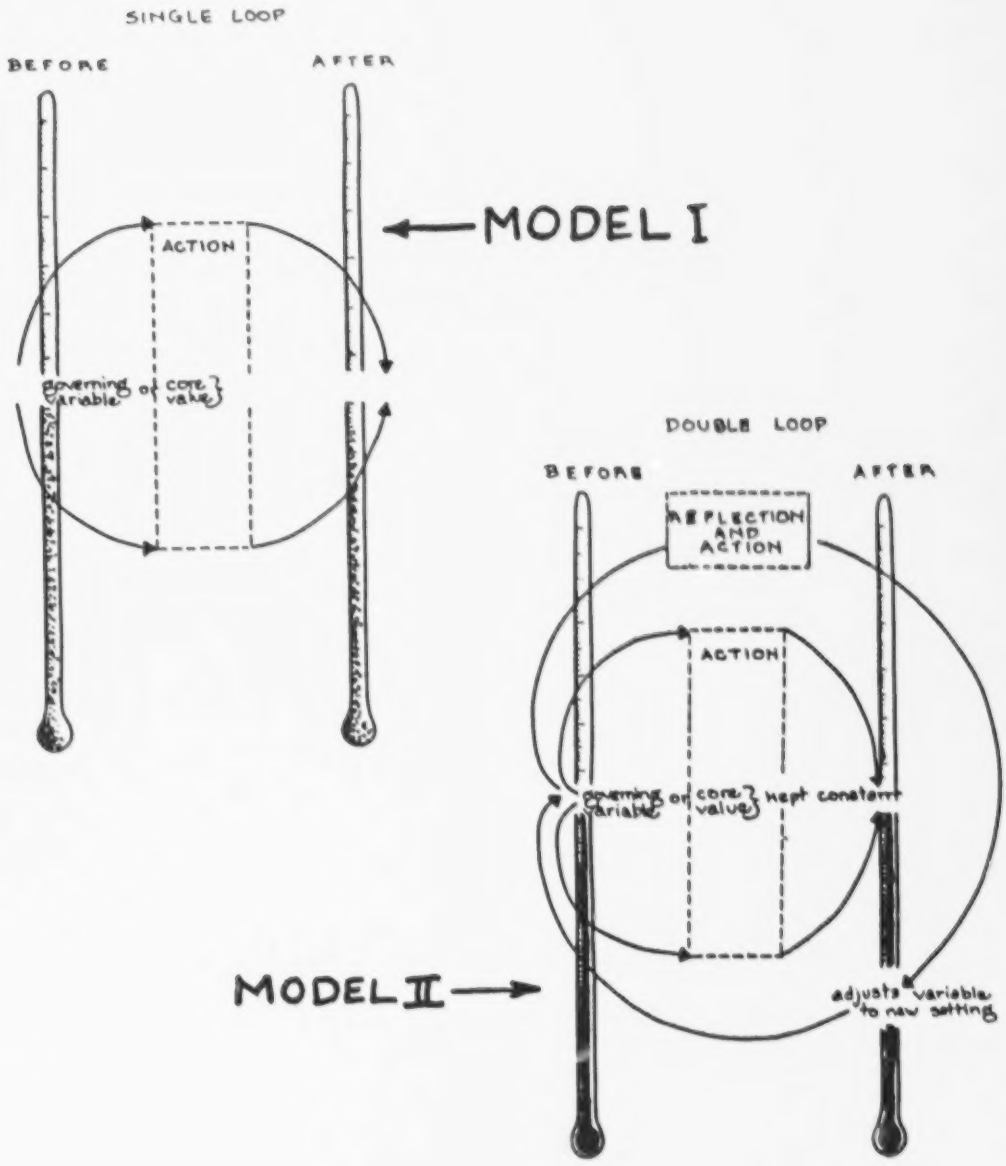


**Figure 8. Illustrations of Models I and II.**

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difficult problems. Model II institutions would be expected to be in a state of flux, continually shifting and adjusting without the need for major upheavals and reorganizations.

Reference to Figure 8 on page 83 illustrates the contrast in the models. Model I is represented by a thermostat and heating system maintaining a constant temperature. By analogy, professional systems, including individuals and institutions, learn to maintain the governing variables (e.g. suppression of conflict) at the existing settings. This is single loop learning. By contrast, Model II behaviour is compared to the situation in which reflection results in changing the setting of the thermostat. The original single loop persists to function in maintaining the new setting. The second loop makes possible a novel form of learning which unlocks the assumptions inherent in the governing variables.

It seems to me that Model I may describe most secondary schools quite closely. But it does not fit the picture of Mountain County Open High School at all well. The poor fit is suggested by the high congruence between the espoused theories and the theories-in-use. It is confirmed by important omissions in the picture. There were only small pockets of competitiveness in the school; adversarial attitudes were almost totally lacking. In other words, the world of Mountain Open was not a win/lose world, and people were not seen in terms of winners and losers. Similarly, I was unable to find any of the protective and defensive behaviour typical of Model I. The interactions observed were marked by language which went beyond the rational as defined above. Thus effective behaviour in this school included both objective and subjective components, used both intellect and feeling. In short, neither students, teachers, principal, nor staff behaved much in accordance with Model I.

The school corresponded much more closely with Model II. The congruence among the theories-of-action is the first clue. The congruence can be explained by the lack of private decision-making by professionals and by the fact that the control and ownership of under-

takings both large and small were shared. Similarly, the public testing of hunches and theories led to congruence and consistency. Each staff meeting was an exercise in surfacing attributions and hunches about students and colleagues. Further testing and checking was done in meetings with advisees. In addition, the school revealed an impressive amount of attention to all kinds of personal problems in students and staff. This is also a consequence in Model II of the lack of defensiveness, willingness to take risks and establishment of trusting relationships.

Two characteristics of the school preeminently demonstrate Model II. The development of a pervasive sense of personal commitment to the enterprise was strong in many students and all staff members. Perversely, it was present even in a student who had decided to transfer out of the school. The central importance of this characteristic was shown by the fact that the students who lacked commitment were the greatest cause of concern and work for staff. Students, too, were involved among themselves in the commitment building process. The second preeminent characteristic of Model II and the school was the pattern of institutional learning. The school as a community tried to find ways to improve what it was doing. It also was open to considering if something else ought to be done. Thus both single-loop and double-loop learning were present. The system encouraged full disclosure of thought and feeling. It promoted risk-taking in every endeavour, including dealing with others. Thus the information in the system had high validity. This valid information combined with high freedom of choice for all participants and the development of internal commitment to the program explains the remarkably strong positive tone of the students' comments. So pervasive was the positive attitude, that even the large number of potential problems and difficulties were seen as opportunities for growth.

The models described by Argyris and Schön are based on their studies of the behaviour and practices of professionals in many fields. But they also say something about the rest of the world. Model I tends to create, at least in illusion, the world it perceives whereas Model II tends to pro-

mote adaptation to the world that is. This is a most important point, because it could be argued that in following Gibbons' ideas, and in generating a school community with strong Model II characteristics, Mountain County Open High School failed its primary espoused mission, namely to provide an education which would enable graduates to enter the outer community as fully competent independent adult members of a free society. But the students were not being trained to make it in a Model I world. And the argument could proceed, based on Model I assumptions, that the school is in fact misleading the students and performing a disservice by preparing them for a non-existent set of conditions.

It is to counter this line of argument that I want to conclude by referring to the adaptive advantages of practicing Model II behaviour and to its implications for life in a free society. The control and manipulation of people, even for the best of motives, in Model I is not compatible with their independence and personal freedom. But Model II is highly compatible with the kind of responsibility and individual status that marks a free people. Thus, despite the prevalence of Model I behaviour in professional and administrative settings, there is good reason to think that the graduates of Mountain County Open High School will be able to deal with them and with the other parts of their society with competence and maturity. challenge because of the lack of competitiveness in the program.

CHAPTER EIGHT

# LESSONS FOR EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATORS

The purpose of this chapter is to point to features of Mountain Open High School which provide useful lessons for experiential educators who work in other kinds of high school programs or who may be working in contexts far removed from secondary education. The intention is to express the lessons in more generalizable terms by relating them to theoretical considerations. The chapter considers the relationship of Walkabout to the Outward Bound movement, to the problem of staff morale, to other forms of experiential education and concludes with reflections on the general cultural significance of Mountain Open High School.

## *THE OUTWARD BOUND CONNECTION*

Walkabout was first proposed in response to a critical social need most clearly revealed by the excesses of high school graduates when, ironically, celebrating their graduations. In a similar way, Kurt Hahn formulated and implemented his educational views in response to his perception that the young were victims of declining fitness, discipline, craftsmanship and compassion. One need only read the news of drunkenness and destruction in a University town in September to realize that the social situation is as unsatisfactory for the young to-day as it ever was in Hahn's day or at the time when Gibbon's first proposed Walkabout.

There are strong resemblances in the values espoused by Outward Bound Walkabout. Both are rooted in optimistic opinion about the capabilities of the young. Both arise from the conviction that the young have a desire to be helpful, to have work to do that is of value and that is worthy of their best efforts. Students are expected to learn to take charge of their own learning and become independent of instructors. There is deliberate exploration of personal and social limits with a view to extending each students perceptions of the possible. There is high value placed on

community, both of the school and of the municipality of which it is a part. Special emphasis is placed on service. Education is understood to be holistic in the sense that it involves each person's whole being. Physical well being, intellectual and moral strength, emotional and spiritual health are valued equally. Operationally, both programs serve best those who are in one of the passages of life, seeking to learn better their own identities and their proper future directions (Wilson, 1981 p152).

Life in Mountain Open High School has strong resemblances to life in Outward Bound courses. In addition to the ideological similarities, there were very practical connections in the early days of Mountain Open High School when two staff members were former Outward Bound Instructors. Even before the adoption of the Walkabout program, Mountain Open was incorporating related ideas into its work through offering Outward Bound style courses and combining course work with the Colorado Outward Bound School. Two examples illustrate this relationship. One refers to self-reliance, the other to learning through service to others.

The basic premise that secondary education constitutes our culture's rite of passage to adulthood demands that a school deliberately and successfully promote sturdy self-reliance in it's students. In *The Sword in the Stone*, T.H.White (1958) suggests a connection with experience. He has Merlin say to the young Arthur, about to leave his tutelage, "Education is experience and the essence of experience is self-reliance." By contrast a conventional school's position is starkly shown in the David Leyland film "Birth of a Nation." A school principal speaks with a prize-winning graduate who has come to report that she is unable to find work and is going on welfare.

> Princ: You can't expect it all to happen immediately. You have certain advantages over your friends. You come from a good home, have a healthy display of qualifications.
>
> Student: I did what you wanted. I did as I was told. I learned what I was told to learn and reproduced it on paper the way you wanted it. So what happens now?

> Princ: It's up to you. You have to get out and do things for yourself.
>
> Student: You never taught us that. You taught us to rely on you. No work, now. No work, ever. What have you done to help us live with that?

Like the development of self-reliance, the practice of compassion through service was a major component of Hahn's educational thought. Significant service to others, especially in novel environments, has the potential to generate significant cognitive and affective learning. This is supported by the trip description in Chapter Six. The presence of important service components in Outward Bound courses varies widely, but it is a solid and substantial part of the Mountain Open experience. Whereas in some respects, Outward Bound might be seen as a model for Walkabout, in respect of the service learning component, Walkabout could well be a model for Outward Bound. Finally, it is important to remember that Hahn's influence is felt in the United World Colleges as well as in the Outward Bound schools. It would be interesting for a future researcher to explore the similarities and differences between a Walkabout school, like Mountain Open, and a United World College given the similarities in their philosphical foundations.

*OTHER FORMS OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION*

Other secondary schools have experiential components which may be usefully compared with the Walkabout program. For example, many high schools have work experience projects in which students perform useful tasks in local offices, schools and industry. Closely related to work terms are apprenticeship programs and cooperative education projects (sometimes called internships). In all of these, students gain direct experience in the work place and are expected to be responsible as learners and workers. The process of their education is set in a real world context. Such programs vary widely in the degree of independence demanded of students. The lesson of Mountain Open High School is that, properly

prepared and supported, students are capable of a high degree of self direction and responsibility before reaching high school graduation.

The well known Foxfire program (Wigginton, 1986) offers a productive contrast to the Walkabout program. Foxfire evolved from one teacher's dissatisfaction with his situation and promotes similar values to Walkabout. An important difference is that Foxfire originated within a traditional school framework and continues to be attached to a conventional secondary school. In Foxfire, students are expected to control and manage their work; the care and appreciation for their culture and the people in whom it lives is in the students' hands. One of the Wigginton's most striking statements is that teachers are off the track whenever they find themselves doing anything that could be done by a student. The placement of real power in the hands of the students is the important common element in the two programs. And it is important to note that students in both these programs are not merely "allowed" to exercise power, rather it is required of them. The point here is that the programs are not permissive in the passive sense of the term, rather they are rigorous and demanding that students accept and fulfill very large obligations.

Most high schools have available some form of experiential education usually in the context of an extracurricular activity. The degree of credibility and the extent of the impact of such efforts varies. Outdoor adventure programs have been shown to influence students strongly and positively; theatrical productions promote creativity, for example. But there is a problem of critical mass because high impact is hard to achieve when such activities have primarily recreational and peripheral status. That most schools find the distinction between curricular and extracurricular activity important is symptomatic and helps support Gibbon's claim that "new systems into old systems won't go."

The fundamental issue here is what counts as curriculum, what counts as learning. In the Walkabout program there is no mention of extracurricular activities. The concept is foreign to the underlying value system

driving the school. Everything counts. All learning is creditable, whether made over a coffee in Munchie, or by sweating a calculus problem in class. Knowledge of literature is as important as knowledge of wilderness. The crucial matter is the development of general competence including the ability to continue learning throughout life.

Gaining independent adulthood involves not only the school but also the community and especially parents. The lesson from Mountain Open about helping students to gain independence in the context of maintaining healthy relationships at home and in the community is the need for continual close consultation and collaboration. Mountain Open teachers hold part of their time free for conferences with community members and parents. There is continually sensitivity to the family dilemmas in promoting independence of children while maintaining loving relationships. In another context, I learned from high school students the great importance they put on looking after their own needs free from parental help (Horwood, 1987). It is an aspect of growing up that requires sympathetic support from both home and school; and school activities which require students to live away from home are powerful contributors in the process. The small size of the school and the classes also contribute to the successful realignment of family relationships.

There are other important factors in Mountain Open High School which provide lessons for experiential educators. They include the presence of challenge and risk in a supportive environment; the productive and creative use of failure; the organization of instruction in small groups and the smallness of the total community; the pattern of decision making and attending consequences which gives "ownership" of the program equally to students and staff. The point is that Mountain Open provides lessons first that these ideals are possible and second shows ways in which they can be brought about. Gibbons (1984) provides a retrospective on the Walkabout program and exemplifies the general process by which similar programs could be established. The same periodical contains a series of short articles, for example see Langberg (1984), which demonstrate the

infinite variety of programmatic versions of the Walkabout ideal. Sweeney (1983) and Gregory and Smith (1986) also give insights and direction for educators who would like to put these ideas into practice in their own schools.

*STAFF MORALE*

The subtlety and indirection of much of the teachers work is very draining. So too is the intensity of the personal interactions with students and peers. There is high potential for overwork, excess fatigue and low morale. It is critical that staff not defend themselves by detachment and isolation. The sustained success of the program depends on maintaining the staff in a state of high spirits and effectiveness. This general requirement for staff is common to many experiential education programs and there are valuable lessons in Mountain Open High School for selecting and maintaining an effective, enthusiastic staff.

Several factors in Mountain Open worked to support staff morale. In the first place, teachers were chosen through an interview process which included students. Consequently, every teacher knew that student representatives had found them desirable. Regular staff gatherings, at least twice weekly, provided support and built networks. The process of peer review amongst teachers was stressful but had the effect of giving support and a positive climate for the staff. Teachers could have no doubts about the esteem in which their colleagues held them, nor about the things which others found irritating. But most important of all was the principal's conviction that care for the staff was his primary concern. Time off in compensation for extra work on trips or comparable events was available. Teachers were encouraged to look out for each other and the occasional day or half day off was urged on a colleague who was feeling the strain. The teachers' involvement, along with students, in planning the program also gave a sense of power and control over their own destiny to the teachers. Another important factor in staff morale is the esteem in which students hold their teachers. Mountain Open teachers were not always

aware of the admiration the students had for them. When I heard expressions of regard for the staff in student interviews and told the principal about them, he immediately asked me to attend a staff lunch and summarize the findings for the teachers. The main points were that students appreciated the caring quality of the teachers, their availability and close attention. Students also enjoyed the presence of teachers in activities where the teacher was not an expert, but had to learn in the same way as did the students. The willingness of teachers to admit ignorance, to try teaching outside their expertise, to attend to their own personal learning all impressed students and when told to teachers served as powerful encouragement.

Finally, the existence of Model II behaviour provides an excellent climate for staff morale. The reflective processes allow for checking hunches and testing uncertainties about each other and the program. Double loop learning offers hope that any given difficult or unpleasant situation can be changed. The essence of Model II is adjustment and learning, both for individuals and for the institution.

*CONCLUSION*

The existence of Mountain Open High School raises some fundamental social issues. The first is that such a radical program is possible. The climate of the times appears to be ultra conservative yet a program like this can appear and flourish. According to Gregory and Smith (1986) it is exemplary but by no means the only example. Beneath the conservative facade, there are rich underground currents of fundamental change.

Part of the climate of change is interest in rediscovering the roots of our culture. We are seeking to establish anew our primitive connections. In this respect the rite of passage idea for secondary education is most timely. There is growing social awareness of the alienation and isolation which modern social structures and media promote. Young persons in particular are increasingly alienated from themselves and from their

environment. There is an urgent if unarticulated desire to restore the connections both internally and externally. Any program which can stimulate that process will strike a resonant chord in the young. Furthermore, we know from primitive societies that knowledge was not compartmentalized into school knowledge and knowledge for the rest of the world. In the Walkabout program we have a restoration of our primitive heritage. At the same time the richness of our culture is not lost in the restoration process. The program works to weave together learnings from the academic disciplines and learnings from encounters with rest of the world.

It is also worth noting the naturalness of the education process in Mountain Open High School. The atmosphere is relaxed, almost effortless, yet this is the consequence of great discipline and focussed energy. There approaches to school discipline and to failure resemble the approaches of ancient societies to these issues. Failure is not a label which comes to characterize a person, but rather is an experience from which all concerned learn. Just as it was and is extremely rare for youths in primitive cultures to fail the rite of passage to adulthood, so is failure treated in this form of education.

These matters raise interesting connections. Kurt Hahn was captivated by the need for contrariness in education. The child of a wealthy and privileged home was to be learn to live without that kind of power. The child of a poor home was to be granted equality. Weaknesses were to be honoured as opportunities. Interestingly, Mountain Open teachers noted that the Walkabout program gave considerable difficulty in the eary stages to academically docile students who were good at following teachers' directions and scoring well on tests. In the same way, only from the other direction, rebellious and irresponsible students found the demands of the program for self responsible self direction very difficult. This attention to apparent contradictions has strong resonance with ancient chinese thought. Aspects of Mountain Open are distinctly Taoist in tone. The Taoist classics state that making many rules goes along with making

many rule breakers. The relative freedom of Mountain Open High School from discipline problems is clearly related to the small number of rules. Similarly, the Taoist classics claim that the best leader is one who is not self assertive but who makes it possible for others to live their lives naturally and without intervention. Chapter Seventeen of the Tao Te Ching (Blakeny, 1955) may be paraphrased: When a program is run without fuss, in the end the students will say, "Of course, we learned it ourselves."

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Adventure** One of the six passages of the Walkabout program with emphasis on an adventurous experience.

**Advisee** A student in relation to a professional teacher acting as advisor.

**Advisor (or Advisee) Group** The heterogenous group of students who share the same advisor.

**Beginnings** The start-up initiation program for each new intake of students.

**Block** Period of time for a particular weekly schedule, most often nine weeks.

**Career Exploration** One of the six passages of the Walkabout program with emphasis on detailed investigation of a particular career.

**Class** A scheduled course involving some measure of formal instruction; a scheduled time slot; the group of students in a given course.

**Closed-door Office Day** A day on which entry to an office is strictly limited on a business basis; friendly dropping in, casual chats and loitering are discouraged.

**Community Learning** Work experience, much less extensive than a Career Exploration Passage.

**Community Service** Synonym for Volunteer Service, one of the Walkabout passages

**Community Support** Helpful persons outside the school, family, friends and community teachers. **Community Teacher** A volunteer from the community who teaches courses either in the school or off campus.

**Comps (time compensation)** Release time for staff in compensation for extra time worked on trips.

**Contract** An agreement with students in trouble, often developed after support group involvement in the case.

**Core** Abbreviation for core skills, the obligatory set of skills in which the student must be competent before beginning any Walkabout passage.

**Course** A major unit of instruction, normally completed in one time block, which may or may not have formal teaching.

**Dog and Pony Show** A slide show describing the school and program and used for public relations and recruiting purposes.

**Evaluations** Statements written by students describing what they learned from any given course or other program component.

**Experience** The experience level of meeting an objective is intermediate between awareness and competence in that objective.

**Fundraising** Individual or small group efforts to get money to help finance program components or for charitable purposes.

**Global Awareness** One of six Walkabout passages emphasizing the study of and involvement with an issue of broad social significance; may be alternated with Volunteer Service.

**Governance** The weekly meeting of the whole school to discuss management issues, hear proposals and reports of passages, community learnings or other off-campus activities.

**Graduation** A class designed to help senior students complete their transcripts, their programs and prepare for school leaving; a ceremony celebrating the completion of the program and the rite of passage.

**Harpsichord** An instrument built by students and volunteers from a kit and used by both students and community groups; a class based on harpsichord construction, maintenance or performance.

**Hiring Committee** A group of teachers and students who interview and select new or replacement teachers, students form a majority on the committee.

**International Dance** A course in a variety of folk dances taught be a community teacher.

**Jeffco** A short form of Jefferson County.

**Jefferson County** The public educational jurisdiction to which Mountain Open High School belongs and from which it draws students.

**Jefferson County Open High School** The Official or letterhead name of Mountain Open High School.

**Journal** A record kept by students, especially in off-campus courses and trips and used as a basis for writing evaluations.

**Knowledge** The primary or basic level of achievement of skills in the objectives list.

**Leadership** A group of students who set the Governance agenda, run the meetings and initiate school-wide activities; counts as a class.

**Learning to Learn** The program which immediately follows Beginnings and initiates new students into the resources available for them to make the curriculum work.

**Logical Inquiry** One of six Walkabout passages emphasizing scientific or other disciplined investigation.

**Lounge** A room in the school for the students' rest and relaxation.

**Mountain Open High School** A common nick name for the school favoured by students.

**Munchie** The cafeteria and lunch room; the course in which students prepare food and operate the lunch service.

**New Student** A student in Beginnings or Learning to Learn.

**Open** A Concept of free access; the high school is "open" to any eligible resident of Jefferson County regardless of the school district within which they reside; meetings and classes are open to visitors, the usual courtesies being observed.

**Open-Living** A term that preceded "open" in the title of the school; an old usage.

**Passage** A major challenge or project in the Walkabout Program.

**Passage Advisor** A teacher with special responsibility for advising students who are preparing for or engaging in a particular passage.

**Passage Committee** The group of teachers, students and others who monitor the proposal, execution and evaluation of a passage for any student.

**Peer Review** An internal assessment of teachers by teachers.

**Practical Skills** One of six Walkabout Passages emphasizing the display of mastery of a useful skill.

**Pre-School** A nursery or kindergarten sharing the Mountain Open High School facility and providing service opportunities for students.

**Pre-Walkabout** The section of the program in which students acquire and improve skills and knowledge as prerequisite to entering Walkabout; the set of objectives required to be met before beginning Walkabout.

**Pupil-Teacher Ratio** An administrative device relating the number of pupils enrolled to the number of licensed professional teachers employed; the actual numbers of pupils per instructor in courses. The two definitions give very different values in Mountain Open High School.

**Recording Studio** A room equipped with sound recording equipment and control console; a course involving the use of the studio, song writing, performance or other aspects of musical production.

**Room** A space assigned to a teacher (e.g. Ruth's room) for office space or instruction or both.

**Rules** The simple code of behaviour for the school: No drugs, no alcohol, no sex.

**Schedule** The time arrangements of courses, meetings and activities for any time block.

**Skills Lab** A particular place for meetings or instruction; a course that is part of Learning to Learn.

**Smoking Porch** A sunny verandah where tobacco smoking is allowed.

**Staff** The set of adults who contribute to the school, broadly including support personnel, community teachers and professional teachers.

**Staff Meeting** A weekly meeting of staff to discuss student progress and general school business.

**Staff Lunch** A weekly lunch-time gathering of staff for both social and professional exchanges.

**Support Group** A set of people gathered to help a student in difficulty with the program.

**Sundance** The greenhouse; a course involving agricultural uses of solar energy.

**Tanglewood** The short name of the alternative junior high school which is an important source of students for Mountain Open High School.

**Teacher** Any person with instructional responsibility in any course; a licensed professional employed to work in the school.

**Transcript** A kind of resume or summary of accomplishments prepared by a student as the principal school-leaving documentation.

**Trips** The component of the program in which groups travel to distant places for substantial periods of time and for specific educational purposes; the course in preparation for any travel experience.

**Volunteer Service** One of six Walkabout passages which emphasizes the identification and treatment of a community need on a voluntary basis; an alternative to Global Awareness.

**Waiting List** The set of names of students awaiting admission at the next intake who will be given the first places available.

**Walkabout** The program of six challenging projects or passages chosen and developed by each student (at least one in cooperation with another student and at least one alone) as ultimate proof of competence.

**Work Trip** A trip where students perform a service often involving construction; the course in preparation for the trip itself.

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**The idea of high school as a rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood was first expressed by Maurice Gibbons in an article called "Walkabout," in which he extended precepts of Australian aboriginal education into an idealized program for North American schools. This revolutionary idea became the curricular basis of Jefferson County Open High School (or "Mountain Open" as it is known locally) in Colorado. EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION IN HIGH SCHOOL: LIFE IN THE WALKABOUT PROGRAM is a stirring ethnography of this school, taking readers into the lives and concerns of the students, teachers and community members who have brought walkabout to life. This is a book for all educators and an important contribution to the literature of experiential education.**

Bert Horwood spent 13 years as a science teacher, department head and school inspector before becoming a professor of education in 1968. He currently heads the Outdoor and Experiential Education Program at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, where he teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in experiential education, writes an environmental column for PADDLER magazine, and busies himself with research into a variety of alternative educational programs. He has written a series of natural science textbooks for children and dozens of articles based on his research and interest in the outdoors. This study of Mountain Open High School was done while on sabbatical leave in 1982/83. When he is not coddling his young grandson or chasing students (and loons) through the rugged Canadian Shield country of eastern Ontario, Bert lives in Kingston with his wife Lyn and basset hound Maude.

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